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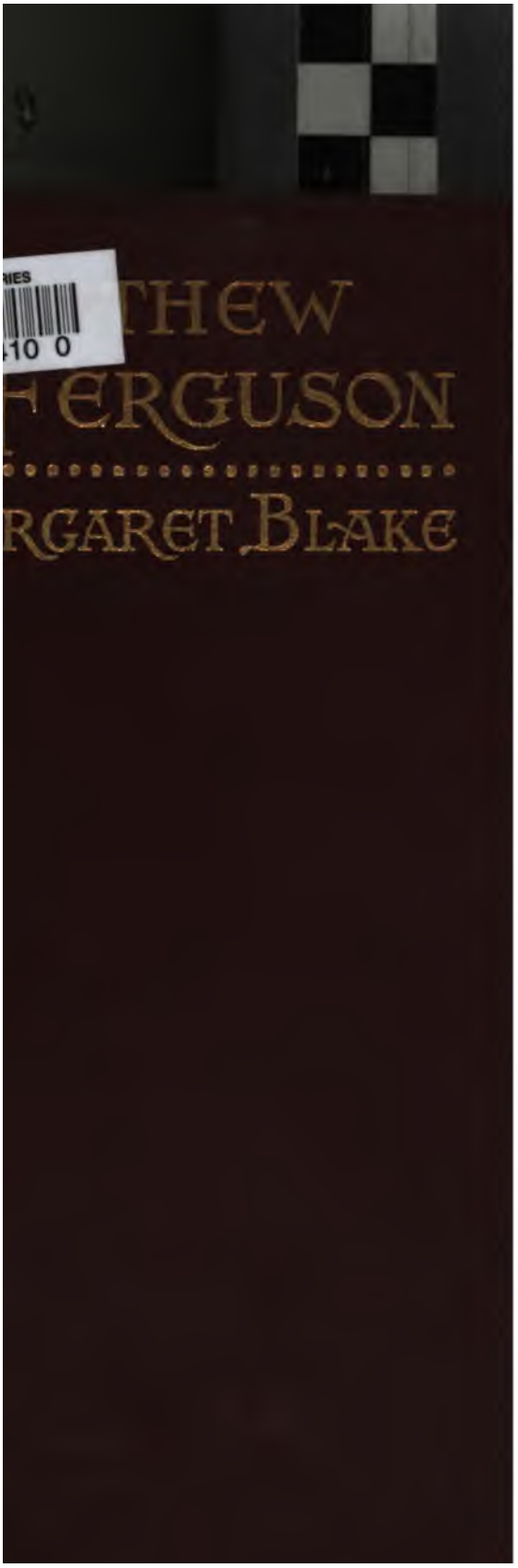
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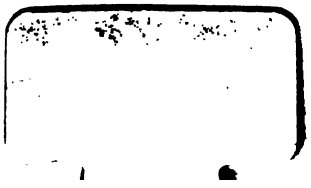

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By

**MARGARET BLAKE**

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"AS YOU ARE GOING TO MARRY ME, MATTHEW FERGUSON, YOU MIGHT AT LEAST PUT YOUR ARM ABOUT ME AND LET ME CRY IN COMFORT."

*Frontispiece.* p. 325

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MARGARET BLAKE

AUTHOR OF

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY

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# MATTHEW FERGUSON

## CHAPTER I

*In Which Mr. Ferguson Has a Tragi-Comic Encounter with Mrs. Ryan, and Admits Himself Beaten in the Gift of Gab*

Doctor Andrew Hart's office hours, extending from eight until eleven in the morning, usually were protracted until long past noon, so the haughty young nurse who was in attendance showed neither surprise nor annoyance when the door-bell summoned her sharply to admit another visitor just as the hand of the tall hall-clock, with a palpable jerk, moved itself from eleven to one minute after.

The young man she admitted was slim, well set-up and conspicuously homely of feature. But whether his excellent figure or his periwinkle-blue eyes, or an atmosphere of honesty which he carried redeemed his really surprising ugliness, or whether the smartness of his attire nullified it, it is hard to say; certain it is that he was that type of man of whom women rapturously exclaim, "What a nice ugly man" and fall forthwith to trusting with that violence of emotion which women bring to every task, their faith being inspired, no doubt, by his plain face and not by other offsetting good points.

The young man's smartness of raiment was exceptional, and the fact that he courted rather than avoided attention was evidenced by the decided color scheme of his

apparel. He was dressed completely in brown. His well-fitting suit of serge was brown, so was his soft felt hat, so, though it was only April, were the expensive looking low shoes, which revealed silk hose of so light a shade of brown as to be almost champagne colored.

The haughty young nurse measured him with a glance, and became a shade haughtier, after the fashion of young women when addressing an attractive young man.

"Your name, please," she said, poising her pencil above a tiny pad.

"Ferguson," said the young man in a wonderfully well-modulated baritone. It was a voice of rare richness and flexibility, which promised volume as well; a voice which once heard would not be forgotten—at least not by women.

"The Mr. Ferguson whom—" the haughty one began languidly. The stranger cut into her sentence with smooth incisiveness.

"Yes," he said, "*the* Mr. Ferguson."

The haughty one frowned. "—whom Doctor Hart is expecting," she concluded, reprovingly.

"Precisely. I anticipated the final clause. Why waste time in futile speaking? I am *the* Mr. Ferguson."

"Doctor Hart requests you to be kind enough to wait until he is through with everyone else," the haughty nurse said unemotionally.

"Certainly," said Mr. Ferguson, not disconcerted, "I expected to do that."

He entered the waiting-room. Doctor Hart was a specialist for juvenile diseases, and the large, dimly lit apartment was occupied solely by women and children, a fact which would have troubled a more self-conscious, or less self-possessed, young man. Not so Mr. Ferguson. He looked about deliberately and purposefully for an available seat, visibly allowed his decision to waver be-

tween a comfort-promising mission rocker in the center of the room and a treacherous looking little gilt chair which stood in the embrasure of the window. The legs of this chair were as thin as drum-sticks and its seat was as small and fragile looking as a woman's handkerchief. Ultimately he chose the smaller chair because of its proximity to the light.

The condition of the chair counseled caution and Mr. Ferguson, fearful of reducing it to kindling wood with hazard to his own anatomy, allowed himself to sink upon it with the gradual languor of an odalisque, while all the temporary occupants of the room looked on, hostilely eager to see the masculine invader meet with the obvious catastrophe.

The obvious catastrophe, however, did not occur. The invader calmly drew a small volume of Emerson's Essays from his pocket, opened it at a place indicated by a tiny silver pencil, and, indifferent to the curious glances which every woman in the room was bestowing upon him, fell to reading the Essay on Self-Reliance.

Again the bell rang sharply, and a minute later there entered an Amazonian woman with a very small child. Indeed, so great was the disparity between the voluminous mother and the tiny infant that Mr. Ferguson's sense of the ludicrous pulled his mouth awry. The Amazon had no temperament evidently, for the funereal gloom in which, by common consent, the waiting-rooms of all physicians are enshrouded was completely wasted on her. She seated herself in the spacious mission rocker, and, placing the tiny one on the carpet before her, with expansive friendliness began to address the assemblage at large.

"The pore chile," she began in a voice which partook of the amplitude of her person, "so afraid is the young wan of the carrh! And hard for me to bring him down

here! I should say so, madame! Thair, thair, me darlint! What though the doctorrh bay traitin' him for nothin', madame? Och, it's not agin' the doctorrh I'm sayin' a wurrd! He's wan as is a gentleman, indade, but it's meself, madame, as loses a dollarrh and a hef by not going out to wurrk to-day! Ye take my wurrd for it, madame, it's a harrdship, thet is."

Mr. Ferguson's mouth was no longer awry with delight. It was impossible to read for the horrid din which the Amazon's voice and brogue were making, and Mr. Ferguson sternly fixed a reproving eye upon her, hoping to overawe her by his masculine superiority.

But the Amazon was an Amazon indeed, and not to be daunted by mere man. She lifted her infinitesimal offspring from the carpet, rolled the little one into her lap, and, using the rocker in much the same manner as her prototypes of old used their fiery steeds, she galloped across the carpet, charging straight at the staring young man. A dexterous swoop deposited the infant on the carpet between them. Mr. Ferguson for all the world of him could not keep a look of alarm out of his periwinkle-blue eyes, while every woman in the room, barring the Amazon, was smiling at his discomfiture. Being women, they understood the hazard of allowing a gabbing female to catch one's eye—the indiscretion which had brought disaster upon him.

"I'm a widder lady," said the Amazon, "and I have no husband."

"That deficiency is not unusual with widow ladies, I believe," said the young man politely.

"Not that I am not willing to marry agin," she continued.

"Why not try a matrimonial agency?" he suggested blandly.

"Though, to be sure, if I did marry agin, t'would be only for the sake of the young wan."

"Wholly disinterested, like all women," he murmured.

The Amazon now removed the speed limit from her tongue. She repeated, with many variations, the tale of her hardships in losing a dollarrh and a hef a day through not wurrking. The situation became intolerable. Mr. Ferguson drew a two-dollar bill from his pocket and handed it to her.

"It will pay your carfare as well as reimburse you for loss of the day's work," he said. "Now think no more about it, and say no more about it."

Turning his back on her, he resolutely gave his attention to his book. But the Amazon, now that he had instituted himself her patron, considered him entitled to the exclusive entertainment afforded by her conversation. On and on trotted her tongue, indefatigably, uninterruptedly, trucelessly. The harassed young man turned suddenly.

"Look here," he demanded, "why do you suppose I gave you that two-dollar bill?"

"Shure, sorrh, becass ye was sorry forrh me."

"Nothing of the sort; I gave it to you because I was sorry for myself. I gave it to you so you'd keep quiet and let me read in peace."

"Well, now," she retorted, "if that was the rayson, faith, ye don't desarve to be left in pace."

A series of giggles emanating from half a dozen throats traversed the room. Mr. Ferguson flushed lightly. Because of the spectators of the fray it now became a point of honor not to be worsted in argument by a washerwoman.

"As I obliged you," he said, conciliatorily, "does it not occur to you that you might oblige me?"

The Amazon's laugh reverberated through the room.

"My wurrd," she said. "Ye're a queer wan. D'ye think I would agree not to spake for the sake of a two-dollarrh bill? Faith, I'd be forgetting how to spake next, and what would I be doing thin?"

What, indeed?

Mr. Ferguson shifted his attack from personal to ethical grounds.

"I believe you said the doctor is treating you for nothing?"

"Heaven is me witness thet I spake the truth."

"Then does it not suggest itself to you that, as a free patient, you ought not to make yourself objectionable to everybody else in the waiting-room?"

"Maynin' yourself?"

"And others."

"It's not the others as are complaining, sorrh! It's only yerself. Whinever I come in here I find them all settin' about like deaf-mutes at a funeral. And, after I have chatted a little while, sorrh, I find them all beginnin' to smile." She laughed until her entire flabby person shook. "Look at 'em now, sorrh," she cried, "they're all smilin'. They were not smilin' when I came in."

"Nevertheless," persisted Mr. Ferguson, "as a free patient I contend that you ought not to make yourself objectionable to *anyone* in the waiting-room."

"Maynin' yerself agin. Now, look here, sorrh, I'll ask you a simple example in arithmetic. If the doctorrh makes ye pay for his advice, but refuses outright to take a red cint from me, who d'ye think he thinks more of, yerself or meself?"

Mr. Ferguson laughed. The Amazon laughed. Every other woman in the room laughed. The shot had told.

Mr. Ferguson recovered his gravity and renewed his attack.

"It so happens," he said, "that I also pay him nothing. I am a friend, a kinsman of his."

"Well, then, sorrh, aren't we on the same footing? You pay nothing, I pay nothing. We're here in the waiting-room as equals."

"No, we're not," said Mr. Ferguson. "For one thing, I'm not here as a patient at all; and then, as the doctor's kinsman, don't you think I have more voice than yourself in the conduct of the waiting-room?"

"I cannot see it, sorrh," she replied, and laughed. "Shtrikes may, sorrh, as the doctor's kinsman, ye ought to welcome all of his patients. If they pay, they're his patrons. If, like meself, they don't pay, seems to me, begging your pardon, sorrh, it's not wan as is a gentleman thet would dish-krim-een-ate!"

Mr. Ferguson sat back and laughed so heartily that the drum-stick-legged, handkerchief-bottomed chair on which he sat wobbled promisingly.

"I give it up," he said. "I take my hat off to you, woman. You certainly have the gift of gab. You would have made a fine lawyer."

"Is it by any chance thet ye're one yerself?" she inquired.

"Perhaps I am. Perhaps I am a business man. Perhaps I am a book agent. Perhaps I am an undertaker."

The Amazon's Homeric laughter again pealed through the room.

"Ye're wan as loves a joke," she said. "It's not a business man thet ye are. It's a newspaper, I'm after thinking, not a book, ye'd be reading then. And ye're not a book agent, for, if ye were, ye'd never be wastin' breath upon wan who has no money fer to buy books. And never in all creation are ye an undertaker, for I'd bet the hair off me head as was given me by the furrst lady I ever wurrked fer as she lay on her deathbed—and

never will I forget how funny she looked as she tuk it off and gave it to me—ye're not an undertaker. Ye're not wan to make a living out of another purrson's tears. Wan as conshiderate as yerself, pretendin' and pretendin' ye give me the two dollars for selfish raysons fer to save me the embarrashment of heving to thank ye for yer gift, faith, sorrh, it's one fine man ye are, I'm after thinking."

Faint rivulets of laughter trickled through the room. Mr. Ferguson's ears were burning.

"I told you the entire truth when I said that I gave you the money because I wanted you to keep still," he declared desperately.

"God bless ye, sorrh! But I don't belave ye! It's a lawyer ye must be, fer I've heard it said that wan as is a good lawyer is wan as is good at preversing the truth as well."

Under cover of the flood of laughter which the Amazon unloosed, Mr. Ferguson made his way from the room. Telling the attendant that he would wait outside for his turn to see Doctor Hart, he seated himself unceremoniously on the brownstone stoop, and in the gusty balm of a New York April day at last was able to read in quiet the oft-read Essay on Self-Reliance.

## CHAPTER II

*In Which Mr. Ferguson Expounds to His Cousin the Infallible System of Scientific Egoism for Achieving Success*

Over an hour elapsed before the nurse opened the door to summon Mr. Ferguson. The Amazon, who was the last patient, made her exit as he entered.

"Hope to mayt ye another day, sorrh," she said, dangling the tiny one on her arm at an angle that partook of the hazards of a circus trick.

"And I hope you won't," he retorted, his smile eliminating rudeness from the words.

"Och!" she laughed. "I was after thinking ye might like your revenge. But perhaps ye're fearing that another mayting would only lengthen yer score agin me."

She passed on and out of the house, and Mr. Ferguson, making his way down the long, marble-paved hall to his cousin's office, wondered that a woman of her class should be so nimble-witted.

Mr. Ferguson had never met his celebrated cousin, and he hesitated a moment before crossing the threshold of the great man's sanctum.

The great man turned out to be a very little man. Mr. Ferguson appraised his height at something less than five feet. His face looked like a dried pippin, and he had large, bony, red, competent looking hands.

"Come in, come in," he cried, the repetition evidently

denoting cordiality and not impatience. "You don't mind, I hope, that I saw Mrs. Ryan before you? I did it because I want a long talk with you. If you can, I want you to lunch with us." At this juncture there came a gentle rap at the door. "Come in, Amanda," the doctor cried.

The door opened and a plain-faced woman entered. She was dressed in fashionable clothes, but she did not wear them well, and her coiffure, that aid to good looks, if judicious use be made of a woman's hair, was unbecoming and careless. So very plain was she that Mr. Ferguson experienced a sensation of acute disappointment. Clearly it was not the doctor's fault that he himself was of insignificant stature, but it seemed unwarrantable that a physician of his reputation should have the poor taste to choose so inconspicuous a helpmate. For the lady looked young to Mr. Ferguson, and his cousin, the doctor, must therefore have married her after his reputation was established. Mr. Ferguson reflected that possibly she was very rich, though his cousin did not look to him like a man who would be tempted by riches.

"Amanda, my dear, this is Matthew Ferguson," the doctor sang out, without turning his head.

Cordially putting out her hand, the lady, upon whom Mr. Ferguson had reflected so disparagingly, came forward with a friendly smile.

"Glad to see you, Cousin Matthew."

Mr. Ferguson made his acknowledgments.

"And hadn't you better complete the introduction, my love," said the lady to the doctor, "by telling your cousin who I am?"

"Well, I suppose he has enough sense to know without being told," grumbled the doctor.

"I think I have," said Matthew Ferguson, laughing. "I think this is my cousin's wife."

"Right you are," said the cousin's wife. "Go to the head of the class, Cousin Matthew."

"Amanda," said the doctor, "may I ask Matthew to stay for lunch—or must he and I go out to get something to eat?"

"Mercy me," said Amanda, "there's food in the larder."

"Yes, but are there plates in the pantry?" asked the great man. "You see," he explained, turning to Matthew. "Everything is packed ready for shipment, and I am sure my wife has kept out only two old chipped plates for us." He added, with a malicious smile: "When we move my wife usually makes the servants eat from old pie plates and wooden butter dishes."

Amanda smiled complacently and in the most friendly manner possible.

"Don't mind Andrew," she said, "his heart is all right, even if his manners are lacking in polish."

The doctor growled.

"But *are* there enough plates and knives and forks?" he demanded.

"Of course there are," said Amanda tartly, "and if there were not, you and I, my love, might eat from one plate to show your cousin a pretty picture of lover-like devotion after twenty-five years of matrimony."

"Twenty-five years!" Matthew ejaculated in genuine surprise.

"Yes, sir! Two days after our wedding he whisked me off to New York, and two days after our silver wedding he whisks me away from New York."

"Then you are leaving New York?" Mr. Ferguson inquired.

"Yes, of course," replied the doctor.

"We lunch at one thirty," said Amanda, and walked to the door, which Mr. Ferguson gallantly opened for her.

In the five minutes in which Amanda Hart had been in the room, his feelings had undergone a revolution, and he was amazed that, having been married a fourth of a century, his cousin's wife was as comely as she was. Her unbecoming coiffure and her indifferent carriage and slipshod way of wearing her fashionable clothes seemed negligible points. He liked her immensely and, because he now liked her himself, he exonerated his cousin's taste in loving her.

Mr. Ferguson seated himself opposite his cousin, and expressed his surprise that the Harts should be leaving New York. Doctor Hart replied by telling him that his dearest wish for some years had been to devote himself to the study of eugenics. "Henceforth," he said, "I will be a follower of Mendel, and not of Æsculapius." And he added that he owned a considerable tract of land in Pike County, in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, near St. Agnes-on-the-Falls, where he hoped to entertain his cousin as often as the latter chose to come.

"Well," said Matthew Ferguson, "it was extremely kind of you to bother about me and my affairs on the eve of your departure."

Doctor Hart waved his red, bony, efficient hands protestingly.

"Not at all, not at all," he murmured.

"Of course," said Matthew Ferguson, "in recommending me to your friends, Underwood and Cannon, you have put them in the way of a very good thing, for I have a superlatively good legal mind—none better in the country—though you did not know that when you asked them to take me on. Although Underwood and Cannon are only a little third-rate concern, I am glad of the berth for a starter. At any rate, I am very grateful to you for getting it for me, Doctor Hart."

The little great man blinked his eyes contemplatively

at this remarkable gasconade of self-praise and depreciation of the gift-horse.

"Well," he retorted in a good-naturedly ironical voice, "doubtless a legal genius like yourself will overhaul a little third-rate concern in less than no time, or find a more suitable position. By the by, don't cousins call each other by their first names up Utrecht way?"

Mr. Ferguson smiled. It was a bewitching smile—some homely men and women have the trick of smiling bewilderingly—and the doctor was by no means impervious to its quality.

"I doubted the propriety of calling you by your first name," Mr. Ferguson replied, "owing to your very high professional standing."

"A genius like yourself should not have such misgivings," protested the doctor, mildly. "When you are as old as I am, undoubtedly you will stand as high in your line professionally as I, who am twenty years your senior, stand in mine."

"I intend that it shall be so," said Mr. Ferguson coolly.

"You intend conquering New York?" inquired the doctor, a look of bland amusement in his shrewd blue eyes.

"I certainly do. What is more, I do not merely *intend* to conquer, I *am* going to conquer this town." Mr. Ferguson squared his chin, threw back his head, and, looking very manly and stalwart, looked his cousin straight in the eyes.

"That's interesting." The doctor's amusement seemed to deepen. "May I venture to inquire how you intend to compass the conquest of Gotham?"

"Of course I have a plan of campaign all mapped out," said Mr. Ferguson airily. "I leave nothing to chance. Do you suppose it is by chance that I am dressed entirely in brown? I never wear any other color. Men

who are successful always have hit upon some novel mode of self-advertisement—it's a bigger factor in success than most men think—and I have made a study of it and can claim to be an expert."

The doctor's mouth quivered at the corners, as he observed sarcastically:

"For one of your years, you possess a bewildering array of knowledge. You have a supreme legal endowment and are an advertising expert! Cousin Matthew, you are far ahead of what I was at your age."

Mr. Ferguson pretended to be unheedful of the doctor's sarcasm.

"Do you suppose," he continued, "it was by accident that I waited until my thirtieth year before making a try at New York? I knew very well that I would not have a ghost of a chance in this big town before my brain had reached maturity. Now, fully prepared to cope with little old New York, I have come down here to sow what I have reaped."

"I see," said the doctor, "you are an idealist."

Matthew Ferguson made a grimace.

"Call me an out and out imbecile and be done with it," he said. "I am the reverse of an idealist. You will believe me when I tell you that the dollar is my ideal and my idol."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Andrew Hart gravely. "The dollar is the best servant in the world but the worst possible master. Every man, particularly every professional man, should have a higher motive in life than the mere making of money."

"The successful men of our country and century have had no other ideal," said Mr. Ferguson doggedly. "I have made a study of the men who have achieved tremendous success—men like Thoreau Beecham, who has just come to the top as president of the Eastern and

Western Railway Company, and Adam Cravatt, of the Interstate Railway Company, whose career is no less sensational, though his father and grandfather were millionaires before him. Well, I can tell you that *my* career is going to be quite as spectacular. Mere money grubbing would be repulsive to me. Fortunately a man with a superlative legal brain, like mine, can obtain a very substantial income to-day, if he knows how, and—well, you will see what you will see."

The doctor's face was a study, but he inquired politely:

"And do I understand that you intend fraternizing with Cravatt, Beecham, and the rest?"

"Fraternizing! A magnet attracts steel—the big corporations attract big legal talent—that is all."

The look of amusement in the doctor's face yielded to one of amazement. The colossal conceit of the young man staggered him.

"I have said too much not to say more," Mr. Ferguson continued, "of course you consider me an asinine simpleton. I think, after I have told you my plan, you will regard me in a different light."

Doctor Hart leaned forward, giving every token of interest. Mr. Ferguson had something of the orator about him whether he delivered himself in rounded periods or brisk, terse phrases. There exuded from him also the personal magnetism so indispensable to the preacher, the lawyer, the actor, and his beautiful speaking voice added a sensuous appeal that was hard to resist. His cousin, against his better judgment, was impressed. In stage jargon, Matthew Ferguson had succeeded in "getting over."

And now, seeing how eager his cousin was to have him go on, the young man, rhetorician that he was, created a proper tension by inquiring solicitously:

"I am not boring you?"

"I assure you I was never more entertained in my life."

Mr. Ferguson resumed his discourse.

"As I said before, I have made a study of the lives of our big men. I dissected their biographies as you dissect a cadaver for symptoms of pre-lethal disease, and I found—what do you think I found?"

"What?" asked the doctor as tamely as any five-year-old listening to the critical point of an Indian tale.

"By synthesizing the traits of these men that have conduced to the success they made, I found that all had one trait in common—selfishness."

"And do you consider that a wonderful discovery?" The doctor resented what he considered an imposition on his credulity.

"It is a great discovery. The sweet, innocent, infantile American belief hitherto has been that altruism—love of God and neighbor—leads to success. I tell you, Andrew, it is selfishness, not the narrow, petty selfishness of ordinary human intercourse, but selfishness on a gigantic scale, selfishness systematically, ruthlessly and consistently applied in business life. In brief, I have discovered the great, unalterable principle of Scientific Egoism, and I mean to apply it, with entire success, in fashioning my own career."

Doctor Hart matched the fingers of his red, bony hands and, resting his chin upon the tower made by the twin forefingers, regarded his cousin gravely. In his eyes twinkled the light of whimsicality, as if in further argument with his cousin he intended to withhold a trump card of some sort. His expression was the expression of a man who is enjoying himself hugely at another's expense.

"Do I understand that you contend that no man can

be successful if, from time to time, he performs an act of unselfishness, of altruism?"

"Indeed not. Witness yourself. You furnish me with a beautiful, concrete example of Scientific Egoism, covered under General Rule Three, and entitled 'Altruism justifiable when adroitly used to further Scientific Egoism.'"

"Good heavens," ejaculated the doctor, "have you got general and special rules, too?"

"Certainly I have. You can see that I have mastered the subject. To return to it. Example number one, furnished by yourself. You befriended me, your cousin, though I have absolutely no claim upon your kindness. Altruism pure and simple, but not barred by Scientific Egoism because it is judicious to further the interests of any member of your family, no matter how remote the relationship, in the expectation that the individual befriended may some day be of use to you."

The doctor's face grew as red as his hands.

"I hope," he said, not disguising his annoyance, "that you do not think that I——"

Matthew Ferguson interrupted him airily.

"Of course not. You're an altruist, pure and simple. To resume. If however, I, instead of being a lawyer, had been a physician specializing in juvenile diseases like yourself, Scientific Egoism would have advised you to refrain from helping forward a future rival."

"Good Lord!" cried the doctor.

"Many a man has come to grief through furthering the interests of a future rival, whom a little care in handling would have crushed at the outset. I devote an entire page to this under 'Special Rule Number Four,' entitled, 'Altruism Indefensible when Conflicting with Scientific Egoism.' Now for Example Number Two,

under General Rule Three. You are treating gratuitously a woman, an Amazonian woman——"

"Yes, Mrs. Ryan," gasped the doctor, smiling broadly. He looked as if his trump card were getting the upper hand of him. "Go on, pray."

"You are right in treating her child for nothing. It takes little of your time, probably is an instructive case, and, moreover, the woman, being a talker, will help spread your fame to such folks as still may be in ignorance of it."

The doctor burst into a merry laugh.

"And under what General or Special Rule of your System of Sublime Nonsense," he demanded, "do you pretend to justify your gift of two dollars to Mrs. Ryan?"

Mr. Ferguson colored to the roots of his hair.

"As she told you that much," he returned, coldly, "she should, in justice to me, have told you my reason for giving her the money."

"Oh, she told me what you gave as a reason," said the doctor, chuckling. "My dear Matthew, you are fooling yourself. You are seeking to justify unselfishness through a ridiculous system of your own invention. Your career will be one of unselfishness, not of selfishness, scientific or unscientific, of that I am sure."

"Oh, sugar," said Matthew Ferguson ruefully. "I must be a very poor talker indeed, if, after all I have said, you are not yet convinced that I am the most selfish, self-seeking, cold-blooded, villainous man alive."

Doctor Hart burst into a peal of laughter.

"I am convinced of no such thing," he said. "I would like to ask you a question, my young kinsman. You said that the dollar was your idol; yet no man worships money for itself. What, then, behind money, is the thing you desire? Is it the power which money confers? The houses and automobiles which money will buy? Are

you an art connoisseur? Or do you merely love the creature comforts of good living—wine, billiards, cards, fine raiment? I am eager to hear your reply."

Mr. Ferguson's face clouded.

"If I am loath to answer that question," he said, "it is solely because I realize that you will misunderstand me. However, I will try to make myself plain. The substance of your question was—to what end do I desire money. My reply is—woman."

The doctor gasped with amazement.

"Women?" he queried.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Ferguson aloofly, "I used the singular, not the plural. I desire money because I believe that the most desirable estate to which any man can attain is to be married to the woman he loves."

For the first time during that remarkable interview the doctor showed distinct anger.

"In other words, you believe that your money, once you get it, will buy you the wife you want? You believe that all women are purchasable?"

Mr. Ferguson laughed. He subdued the laughter, but his bewitching smile lingered behind, and once more the doctor capitulated to its magic. Mr. Ferguson continued gently:

"I think enough of my powers of fascination to believe that I can win any woman whom I essay to win. But when I approach her, I do not wish to approach her as a beggar. So she be of gentle birth I care not whether she be rich or poor—it is a woman's prerogative to be either without jeopardizing her birthright as a gentlewoman. But there are two things I demand of her. She must be gently bred, and I must be the first man to enter the sacred circle of her affections. There must be no other before me—not as much as a thought or a sentiment must

she have given to any other man. I want her mind to be a virgin leaf on which I can impress my own image. As to financial condition, I think I would prefer to have her poor, for it will be such an incomparable delight to feel that I have the ability to surround her with luxuries, perhaps with comforts to which she has not been accustomed. For, I repeat, I do not intend to court her as a beggar. All women adore success, and they stand strictly within their right in adoring it. It is the old, old instinct reaching back to the age of stone—when the successful man was the man of brawn and mettle who could be trusted to kill the enemies who menaced his home, and to slay enough game to provide food for his mate and offspring. That instinct, purged and sifted, to-day, takes the form in woman of love of success in the male, and you must remember that the almighty dollar is the measure of success. Now I have an idea, Andrew, that my woman, when I find her, will be a creature of strong primitive instincts, all snow and flame, you know, slumbering under the modern veneer of culture. So you see that there is nothing venal in my attitude. I am preparing my plumage and my song with which to woo my mate."

"I am truly surprised," said the doctor, with averted eyes, "that you permit emotion and sentiment any place in your Infallible System of Conquering the World."

"A man must have some motive to goad him into battle," replied Matthew Ferguson. "You asked me for mine, and I told you what it is. Besides, my profession is one in which, as in yours, a man runs to seed if he dehumanizes himself too far. A wife I love will keep me in touch with my kind and force me to keep my poise."

"But," the doctor objected, "usually it is considered highly ethical, very unselfish, you know, for a man who

has been successful to choose a wife irrespective of financial conditions."

"Well, I want what I want, and I know exactly what I want. Most decidedly I do not want a social butterfly, a girl who has never done an honest day's work of any sort in her life, and whose sole existence is spent in pleasure-seeking. I want a woman for my mate who is healthy and happy and vigorous, and who will bear me healthy, happy, vigorous children, and who will be happy in rearing a family; a woman, you understand, who looks forward to motherhood as the natural, inevitable and desirable culmination of wifehood; the sort of woman who can be depended upon to have daughters who will be counterparts of herself, so that, in looking at them I may see reflected in them the charm of her own childhood, girlhood, adolescence, and whose sons will be cast in my image, so that she, my wife, may see in them myself in miniature, in boyhood, in process of growth."

The doctor sat opposite his cousin, laughing gently.

"I suppose you will know the right woman the first time you see her," he suggested.

"Certainly," the dauntless Matthew replied.

"Rank, lush idealism, my boy," chuckled Andrew, "love-marriages are so good for the race that they should be wholly discountenanced by the Reliable Conquest System of Scientific Egoism."

"You are laughing at me," said Matthew Ferguson, "well, laugh away. As to your last statement, permit me to tell you that in making the same you have shown yourself guilty of the slovenliness of thought which unhappily is so prevalent. I have already cited General Rule Three, entitled 'Altruism justifiable when adroitly used to further Scientific Egoism,' and when you see the chart I have prepared, which embodies the System, you will see that Scientific Egoism is always glad to join

hands with Altruism when it can do so without detriment to the individual, because altruism, publicly practised, gives a man a good standing with those who are stronger in the heart than in the head; and it is therefore a valuable asset."

"You will never convince me of your egoism," said the doctor.

"In the course of my career," Matthew Ferguson retorted, "I will do many things which to the superficial observer will appear unselfish. I intend working under Special Rule Five, 'Scientific Egoism in the hands of the Judicious turns Philanthropy to good account.'"

"Construe, if you please," said the doctor.

"When I was at college," began Matthew Ferguson, "I heard a strange story of real life which gave me the germ of an idea which I later utilized in my Theory. The story was this. An aid society of a large Western city had been conducting its affairs in a slipshod, perhaps a dishonest, manner. A bright young lawyer began attacking them. In season and out of season he raked his muck. They could not silence him. He was the sort, you see, that would not admit himself beaten, though he was beaten, and, after every defeat in open court, he hauled out his rake again and began afresh. Finally, in desperation, the officers of the aid society offered, at a substantial salary, to make him president of their humanitarian society, which was shamelessly mulcting its members."

"Did he accept?"

"Sure, he accepted. Not being a mind-reader, I do not know whether he had been sincere at the outset, and corrupted later on, or whether he had anticipated the actual result of his busy little rake. At any rate, I intend to duplicate that performance, with slight variations, on a very much larger scale."

A look of alarm came into the doctor's eyes.

"Look here, Matthew," he said with warm concern, "that really is—isn't it?"

"I'm glad you didn't say the word, because it is not a pretty one. No, it is not blackmail. The blackmailer extorts money from an individual or corporation by threatening to divulge some indiscretion or dishonesty committed in the past. A person operating under Special Rule Number Five, on the other hand, attacks a present dishonorable usage in expectation of being retained, by the person or corporation attacked, to prove that the dishonorable usage is in reality highly honorable."

The two men fell silent. They regarded each other intently.

"Well," questioned Matthew Ferguson, "have I convinced you at last that I am the most utterly selfish, venal, insincere and corrupt man on earth?"

"No, you have not," said Doctor Hart slowly. "I agree with Mrs. Ryan, whose judgment of you I give in her own words. 'He is a young man, sorrh,' she said"—the doctor imitated the rolling legato of the Irishwoman's brogue to perfection, "'who does a thing that sarves another's interest and then pretinds he did it for to sarve his own.'"

"Oh, sugar," said Matthew Ferguson. The foolish little expletive made him seem singularly boyish.

"There is a passage in one of the poets," continued Doctor Hart, "concerning the man who is true to himself. I shall repeat it for you:

> "'This above all, to thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.'"

"Now," said Andrew Hart, "a man, who, like yourself, holds women in high respect; who is determined to make a clean, moral, ethical choice when he marries, will never go far astray. You have invented this delicious farrago of nonsense, which you term a System, to serve as a buffer for your unduly developed idealism. Without a constant reminder to yourself that it will not do to be wholly unselfish, if we wish to accomplish anything at all in this world, you would allow your kind-heartedness to stand in the way of your legitimate business career. Yes, my cousin Matthew, your respect for women is the touchstone of your character. It is your Achilles' heel. It will find you out in the end. In keeping your ideal of marriage and of woman pure you are keeping your inner tabernacle pure. You may sail bravely upon the sea of selfishness for a while, but I predict, in the end, because you are true to yourself, you will be forced to be true to all mankind."

Matthew Ferguson made a pretense of collapsing into his chair.

"Oh, sugar," he said again, "and all that to me!"

## CHAPTER III

*The Apostle of Scientific Egoism Begins Operations, and Turns Philanthropy to Brilliant Advantage*

The Apostle of Scientific Egoism lost no time in beginning operations under Special Rule Number Five.

The arrangement made with Underwood and Cannon was profitable to both parties thereto in that the little "third-rate concern" paid their new assistant a mere clerk's salary in return for permission to secure for himself such cases as fortune might see fit to throw his way.

Mr. Ferguson allowed a month to elapse in feeling his way. Then, knowing that he had made a favorable impression upon Judge Witherspoon, a magistrate with whom business of the firm brought him into frequent contact, he cast about for ways and means of serving the Judge. The Judge was not a rich man, but he had splendid connections. He was, among other things, brother to Mrs. Amos van Duyskuk, who, in capacity of leader of the old Knickerbocker blood of Gotham, had made more than one career. The Judge was also known to be an intimate friend of Adam Cravatt, the president of the Interstate Railway Company. All in all, the Judge was the most desirable person with whom Matthew Ferguson had come in contact.

An opportunity to serve him came in May. A little girl of twelve, working in a cannery owned by a man whom Judge Witherspoon had every reason to dislike

for political reasons, owing to the fact that her employer had neglected to provide a safeguard prescribed by law, had her forefinger cut off. The Judge, apprized in advance, notified the friendly newspapers that "something special was on," so that a report of his ancient enemy's discomfiture would be scattered far and wide. Mr. Ferguson, he knew, would make the most of the case, and Mr. Ferguson, in truth, excelled himself. The dusty, hot courtroom, and all that were in it, marveled at the unaccustomed eloquence of the boyish looking young lawyer, with the homely, kindly face, who was dressed all in dapper brown. Needless to say, the plaintiff won, and Matthew Ferguson went to his boarding place that night feeling assured that he had made a valuable friend in the person of the Judge.

He rose early the next morning in pleasurable expectation of seeing his name blazoned forth on the first page of a half score of papers, and his dismay on approaching his news stand can be imagined, as he realized what actually had happened. Fate had tricked him. The Invulnerable System was vulnerable after all. Every newspaper in town had turned renegade, shamelessly giving over the entire front page to one single item of news. The "Bulletin" had a scare head printed in letters fully five inches deep. Even the conservative papers, like the "Sun," which disdained running scare heads across the entire seven columns of a page, had barred all other items from the first page, sacred to the "live" news of the day, and made an imposing spectacle by running their body type flush up to the head rule of each column with the exception of the first. There was something ominous in the chaste simplicity of that first page of the "Sun." Matthew Ferguson hastily seized it from the stand, and stood reading the head-lines in the first column before paying for the paper. Over six hun-

dred girls had been burned to death in a factory on the East Side, and the newspapers, one and all, had been inconsiderate enough to conceive this catastrophe of greater interest to the public at large than Matthew Ferguson's début as champion of the poor.

Mr. Ferguson was furious. Hanging to a strap of the crowded "L" train, he anathematized the men and women who were intent with the deadly intentness of indignation and horror on the newspapers in their hands.

"Sharks, vampires, kites, jackals," he mentally addressed them. "Gorging yourselves on a recital of the death agony of innocent young girls. Faugh, you make me sick. Talk of bull-fights. Talk of Roman gladiators. Gad, it nauseates me merely to read the head-lines, and there you are, gentle young women as well as clean-cut men, fairly gloating over the hideous narrative of that six-hundredfold death struggle."

He reached his office building in the most unamiable frame of mind imaginable. It was a Saturday, and the heat which sometimes comes in May had sent Messrs. Underwood and Cannon off for the week-end the night before. Mr. Ferguson wondered whether he should run down to Brighton that afternoon to drown himself, or whether it was more advisable to take the train to St. Agnes-on-the-Falls and be coaxed by the Harts—whom he had visited two weeks before in their new home—into giving the Infallible System another trial. But, as he turned the corner in the hall leading to his office, he became aware that the holiday was not for him. A fretful, voluble, swaying mass of people—East Siders, as he saw at a glance—choked up the hall in front of his office. He elbowed his way through the throng, and unlocking the door, entered his office, the mob streaming in after him and filling every bit of space, stationing themselves behind copy press and filing cabinet, seating

themselves on chairs, on desks, clinging like drowning men to the very hat rack and partition in their frenzy to get into the small room, but respectfully leaving a circle of space about him. And they were silent as death.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

A stocky, undersized, pasty-complexioned Polish Jew, with an enormous, unweeded beard, came forward, and said, in tolerable English:

"Ve vant you should to help us. Ve are the sisters, brothers, mothers and vaathers of the fire victims."

At sight of that dumb herd of poor, cheap human cattle, their stolid, heavy, ungainly faces quickened into something like spirituality by the agony of the night they had been through, an emotion moved in Matthew Ferguson for which the chart of the Impeccable System had made no provision, and which it would have condemned heartily as blatant and jejune.

"I do not see that I can do anything for you," he said in a gentle voice. "Plainly, this is a case for the District Attorney."

The spokesman turned up his thumbs. The gesture was eloquent.

"Vot he vill to do is for to make nodding but a big noise and let the rascals go scot-free. You know he vill to do that."

Yes, Mr. Ferguson knew it, and for the moment forgot all about the System, so intensely sorry was he for the men and women who had come to him for help.

"If the District Attorney does not send Goldhammer and Wolffe to Sing Sing for this, no power in the land can or will."

"You are a goot man," quoth the spokesman. "A vriend are you to the poor. A soot you vin for leetle Miriam Levy only yesterday, who did to have her finger

cut off. All about it ve know. Can you not then think of some vay for to help us, too?"

Psychology contends that the human mind is incapable of formulating thought without the vehicle of words. But the speediest talker that ever lived could not have enunciated the words necessary to draught the thoughts, the plans, the hopes that now flashed through Matthew Ferguson's fertile mind. He thought *en bloc*. In a twinkling he conceived a gigantic plan of helping these unfortunates and of serving himself as well. In the brief passage of one minute of silence he visualized every detail, weighed and tested every tentacle of the hook with which to grapple fame and perpetuate it for himself.

And now, too, that Scientific Egoism lent its august countenance to the luxury of altruistic emotion, he allowed the delicious sentiment to thaw the ice out of his veins. When he spoke it was with genuine fervor.

"We can punish Goldhammer and Wolffe in one way only—by making inroads on their till—on their pocketbook, you know."

The Pole shook his unkempt head.

"Not vot ve vant is that," he said. "Ve vant not the money of those fiends. Ve vant them to shall be punished."

"But you can punish them in one way only—by forcing them to disgorge some of their ill-gotten gains," said Matthew Ferguson. "I could bring suit for you for damages, individually or collectively. The jury would be certain to value each life at a minimum of two thousand dollars. You can figure out for yourself what a neat little hole that will make in the pocket of the humanitarian firm that allowed your sisters, daughters and sweethearts to be burned in that fire-trap."

Again the eloquent thumbs of the Polish Jew shot upward.

"Ve vant not the money," he reiterated somberly. "Vot shall ve to do with money like that? Can ve eat food vot is bought vit money given us because our lofed vons vere burnt to deatt like they had been cows in a barn? Can ve put vine raiment on our backs vot ve vould not hef had oddervise ven our poor girls are so burnt dat ve cannot even to put a shroud on dem? Can ve to pay rent for to liff in a fine, safe house vid such money ven dair poor bodies vas so charred and burned dat we cannot buy even an individooal coffin for each?"

Mr. Ferguson lowered his eyes before this burst of homely eloquence. A momentary feeling of shame welled up within him. This man, who was a typical representative of a race which has earned the sad distinction of being considered supreme in shrewd money-cunning, showed princely disdain—poor wretch though he was—for money to be obtained from the loss of innocent lives. Yet he, Matthew Ferguson, scholar and gentleman, did not disdain to make capital out of the self-same ghastly affair.

He wavered only a moment. Then Scientific Egoism—at least so it pleased him to think—conquered, counseling him that the Great System was worth nothing if it was not capable of helping a man crush his natural feelings when occasion demanded. Besides, System or no System—Mr. Ferguson was weak enough to be thankful it was so—it happened that this time his cause was a strictly honest and honorable one, though his motive for embarking upon it did not bear close scrutiny.

"I honor your hesitation," said Matthew Ferguson to the Pole, "but I repeat, there is no other way. I can thoroughly understand that none of you would wish to use that money—blood money——"

"Blood money, ya, ya, blood money," a half dozen voices sang out.

"And therefore," Mr. Ferguson continued smoothly, "I suggest that this blood money, if the verdict is in our favor, be used to erect a monument perpetuating the memory of those who perished."

A deep, guttural, rumbling sound of satisfaction rolled through the office. The spokesman, before he could turn around to consult with his followers, was besieged on all sides. Eager hands plucked his sleeves, his arms, his shoulders. That inchoate mass of men and women could not make themselves understood in English, although they could understand it, and they jibbered madly in Yiddish. Matthew Ferguson's suggestion had been a stroke of genius, as none knew better than himself. What a tribute such a monument would be, among other things, to the enterprise and probity of Matthew Ferguson!

"If we get anything," he continued easily, "we will get enough money out of those hounds who murdered your girls to have a first-class sculptor like Carl Bitter, or Gutzon Borglum, or possibly that wonderful Anastabele St. Leger, who has such sympathy and love for the children of your district, design the monument and buy a conspicuous site for it."

"Ya, ya!"

Bedlam was let loose around him. Matthew Ferguson, who had never seen an excited East Side mob before, was paralyzed with surprise. The men gesticulated, the women jabbered; several older women knelt down and wailed and beat their breasts and begged to kiss Mr. Ferguson's hands. They acclaimed him their protector, their patron, their defender.

Thus it came to pass that, within a year after his advent in New York, everything having fallen out as our hero had the prescience to predict, a fountain in stone,

designed by one of the greatest of American sculptors, was erected near the site of the tragedy and within stone's throw of Broadway. It was unveiled with all the circumstance and pomp which the Empire City is capable of mustering. It was in the form of a burning tower, and the stricken faces which looked from the windows were described by the press as the last word in realism. The water of the fountain spouted from the hose of the firemen. It was all very impressive and splendid, and, since Mr. Ferguson had so nobly espoused the cause of the poor, and had so generously refused any emolument whatever for his work, the grateful East Siders insisted that a medallion showing his head be placed in bas-relief in a conspicuous place on the pedestal, with an inscription telling all about the generosity and highmindedness of the young man.

Of course Mr. Ferguson made a speech on the occasion of the unveiling of the monument. The Mayor was present; so was the District Attorney, who was the successor in office of the incumbent who had acquitted Goldhammer and Wolffe; so was Sousa's Band; so was Judge Witherspoon; so was the sculptor, who, on the grandstand, congratulated Matthew Ferguson, in presence of the Mayor and some minor functionaries, upon his disinterestedness in donating his time gratuitously. Everybody went home entirely satisfied and content, especially the high-minded, disinterested Mr. Ferguson, who had secured six months' splendid advertising out of the affair, and who was so aglow with having done a kindly thing that, while the speeches lasted, he actually forgot how well he had served his own interests, and thought only of the poor people whom he had gratified.

It was very much more pleasant, he reflected that evening, to do a kindly thing than to do an unkind one, and he hoped devoutly that the kindly deeds would be those

most frequently requisitioned by his Infallible System. Then he recalled Andrew's prediction, and quarreled with himself for being so soft.

Matthew Ferguson was destined to get more out of the affair than mere publicity. In spite of the exhaustive accounts of the newspapers, he received numerous letters asking for more detailed information about this or that in connection with the tragedy, to all of which Mr. Ferguson replied with utmost civility.

On the morning following the unveiling of the statue, Mr. Ferguson arrived at his office in a particularly happy frame of mind. Waiting at the curb, he saw Mrs. van Duyskuk's carriage, with her servant in livery standing beside it. He knew the equipage, which was made conspicuous by its dove-gray body, because Judge Witherspoon, being suddenly seized with gout one evening, had made use of it in driving to Matthew Ferguson's modest boarding place to consult with him on some legal point.

Mr. Ferguson, hoping that the Judge was waiting for him in his office, hurried to his room.

"Is Judge Witherspoon here?" he asked of his clerk.

"No, sir, but he called a few minutes ago. He did not say whether he would be back or not."

"Damn," said Mr. Ferguson. It was quite plain to him that the Judge had passed him in the car which sped downward as his own car sped up in the elevator shaft.

"Lady waiting for you inside, sir," admonished the clerk.

Cross and irritated because he had missed the Judge, Mr. Ferguson entered his own sanctum. He was in no mood to hold converse with some idle trespasser on his time.

He found the lady, who was seventy or over, standing, and looking as if she had just entered. She was gazing

about helplessly for a vacant seat, for the only chair empty of letter files, documents, and books was the revolving chair in front of Mr. Ferguson's own desk.

Now if there was one region of his brain which had so far successfully resisted the teaching of Scientific Egoism, it was that portion of the cerebrum which governs a man's attitude toward women. His was the attitude of a man who is derived from clean-living, clean-thinking ancestors, and who has lived a clean life himself. Matthew Ferguson saw in every woman, particularly in every old woman, a subject of respect, almost of veneration, and therefore, employing his most deferential manner, he placed a chair for the little old lady, whose plain, well-worn black silk dress and battered velvet bonnet showed shabby and gray in the sharp morning light. She was a very attractive old lady nevertheless, with a trim, slim figure and a complexion as rosy as a young girl's.

"Poor thing," thought Matthew Ferguson, "she has seen better days." "What can I do for you, Madame?" he inquired deferentially.

She had come to learn whether one Rachel Liliencron, whose name was given by the newspapers that morning, in repeating the list of fire victims, was identical with a girl who had worked for her some years ago. "When you were still in affluence, you poor old thing," thought Matthew Ferguson.

Mr. Ferguson consulted his files, found a description of the girl, and read it to the old lady.

"She is not the same person," said the old lady, and thanked him, adding, "You acted honorably and nobly in this affair, Mr. Ferguson."

If true to his principles, Matthew Ferguson should not have encouraged further conversation. As the little shabby old lady could not conceivably be of any use to

him, he should have rid himself of her as speedily as possible. But, having just brought to so happy a conclusion a master stroke of the higher Scientific Egoism, Matthew Ferguson lulled his conscience to sleep in regard to his excursion into the field of pure, and therefore unjustifiable, altruism.

"It's very good of you to say so," he said, with as much deference as if the shabby little lady had been a queen.

"I do not think it matters to you what a shabby old woman like myself thinks of you," she said. Her eyes twinkled.

"I have tried to make it plain," the young man retorted, gravely, "that I consider those my friends who are not highly endowed with the goods of this world."

"A modern knight-errant! You would serve me, too, if necessity arose?"

"Ah, Madame, can you ask?" It was almost a flirtation, Mr. Ferguson thought. The dear old lady was so pretty and gentle and sweet that he would have gone considerably out of his way to do her bidding.

"I believe you would," she exclaimed admiringly.

"I am sure I would," said he. "Beauty should always command valor, and, begging your pardon, Madame, my eyes serve me a trick if you were not a belle in your days, a toast, I should say, for when you were twenty-one it was still considered good form to toast the woman for whom all men were rivals."

The old lady leaned back comfortably in her chair and eyed him not without amusement.

"Whether you mean all that or not I cannot be certain," she said.

"Why should I say what I do not mean?" he asked, blandly.

"Exactly—why should you flatter a shabby old woman, one who has neither youth nor worldly goods."

Mr. Ferguson turned scarlet. But he continued to speak, in his gentlest tone, the tone that had made the Jewish women kneel down and beg to kiss his hands.

"Dear lady, if I gave you offense when I classed you thus, I ask a hundred pardons. I could no more help noticing that your gown is threadbare than I could help noting the breeding which is the ineradicable token of birth. And, believe me, I would as willingly serve you as I would serve my own mother, if I still had one, or an aunt."

The old lady sat with downcast eyes.

"You gave me no offense, none in the world," she said with the crisp demureness of a girl in her teens. The thought flashed through Mr. Ferguson's head that she might not be an old lady at all, but a young girl bent on a bout of mischief. He dismissed the suspicion as his visitor rose to her feet. No sprightly miss would think to simulate the rusty hinges of creaking old age apparent in the lady's every movement.

She fumbled at her reticule and from it she extracted a card, which she handed Mr. Ferguson.

"I receive my friends every day after four o'clock in the afternoon," she said, "except Sundays. I shall be glad to see you some day."

Mr. Ferguson received the card without looking at it.

"Poor thing," he thought, "poor old thing—I wonder how many friends are left her in the days of her adversity?" And he assured her that he would be happy to come. With sudden bitterness he thought of the comfortable carriage of Mrs. van Duyskuk, in which the well-fed Judge, suffering well-deserved twinges of gout for his indulgence at table, was no doubt comfortably lolling at the moment on his way to court. His visitor, perhaps,

lacked car-fare. But could he offend her by offering her a little money? Never.

He bowed obsequiously as she left the room. Why not give her the innocent pleasure which all women, young or old, feel who are the objects of masculine gallantry?

He walked back to his desk. He would call on her—some day when Scientific Egoism was not exacting in its demands. It was judicious, after all, not to dull all human sensibilities, and altruism, practised on a small scale. . . .

Matthew Ferguson's reflections here came to an untimely end. He had just caught sight of the name on the card which his impecunious-looking visitor had handed him. The card read:

Mrs. Catharine van Duyskuk
At Home
Four to Six Fifth Avenue
Every Week-day
Afternoon

Matthew Ferguson ran to the window and, jeopardizing life and dignity, crawled out upon the window sill, and lying flat upon his stomach, strove heroically for a last glimpse of his visitor. He was in time to see her step into the dove-gray equipage.

Invertebrate as a caterpillar that has just been reduced to jelly by the scornful heel of Providence, Matthew Ferguson crawled back into his office.

"Oh sugar," he ejaculated. His dominant feeling was one of thankfulness for having indulged his penchant for old ladies.

## CHAPTER IV

*In Which Mr. Ferguson Finds That Fortune and Love Conspire in His Behalf, and, Availing Himself of the One, Rejects the Other*

On a cloudy afternoon about a week later Mr. Ferguson, attired in his finest suit of brown serge and best white and tan linen, presented himself at Mrs. van Duyskuk's residence.

To his surprise he found deserted the vast drawing-room into which he was taken. The footman carried away his card on a silver platter, and Matthew Ferguson was left behind, the solitary occupant of the magnificent apartment. He had never seen an interior like it before—all hand-carved English oak, black with age, upholstered in bright red damask. A multiplicity of valuable bric-à-brac, clocks and vases stood about; handsome oil paintings, in massive gold frames, hung upon the walls, and the carpet was so thick and soft that it received the impression of the foot with the same subserviency as a growth of moss in a leafy grove.

The footman returned and requested him to follow him upstairs, as Mrs. van Duyskuk elected to receive him in her sitting-room, a proceeding which, ignorant though Mr. Ferguson was of social etiquette, he surmised was unusual.

The sitting-room was very different from the massively showy apartment below. The woodwork was white, and

so was the furniture, while draperies, chair cushions and couch upholstering were of Delft blue and white chintz. On a white table stood a work basket, containing pink and white worsted with the knitting needles flashing from either end of the huge, fluffy balls. Matthew Ferguson began to play nervously with those needles. For he was nervous, though he refused to admit the fact even to himself.

"I asked you to come up here because I am indisposed," said Mrs. van Duyskuk's voice, and turning on his heel, he made the old lady his neatest bow. She was *point devise* to-day, and looked charming and every inch a queen in the robe of mauve satin bordered with pale blue. On her head she wore a scarf of priceless Duchess lace. She had had neuralgia for a week, but refused to discuss her ailment, saying that she was something of a Christian Scientist, and reserved her aches and pains for her doctor. She motioned him to a chair.

"I have received no one for a week," she said, when they were seated, "but I could not send away my knight-errant, who is so willing to fight the battles of all old, friendless females in reduced circumstances."

"Dear lady!" poor Matthew hoisted the color of embarrassment to his cheek. "It required the exercise of every iota of courage I possess to bring myself here. Be merciful, then, instead of just, or I shall lose the little courage I have."

"Then hear my confession and your courage will seep back. There was no Rachel Liliencron."

"Oh, yes, there was," said Matthew Ferguson, innocently.

"Stupid man—I mean, I never knew her."

"Then why?"

"A woman requires an excuse when calling on a man to whom she has taken a fancy."

"You bewilder me."

"You mean, I frighten you. Do you suspect me of making love to you?"

Her blue eyes fairly twinkled with mischief. The sweet old face looked at him with the crisp demureness he had thought so charming, almost adorable, at their first meeting.

"If I suspected that, I would be flattered, not bewildered."

"Do you deluge young women with extravagant compliments, also?"

"They would be wasted on the present generation."

"We should have been contemporaries."

"And are we not?"

"No, my boy!" She placed one withered hand on his arm and, with the latitude allowed old age, held him fast. "The outgoing and the incoming centuries clasp hands for one brief moment, then are swept apart forever. Thus with different generations."

"Yet Ninon de l'Enclos's grandson, at eighteen, not knowing her, fell in love with her when she was eighty."

"But I have no anonymous grandsons, and you are thirty and I am seventy," she rebuffed him dryly.

"Dear Mrs. van Duyskuk," he entreated, "*why* did you come to my office?"

"You mean, why did I come dressed in that shabby gown?"

He nodded his head affirmatively.

"I came—because I wanted to judge you for myself. You seemed too good to be true. To do all you did without monetary return—it was princely. Now, having tested you, I know you are a prince, indeed, and I am satisfied."

"You are mysterious."

"I will be so no longer. You are so high-minded,

generous, sincere that you need a guardian angel to look after your affairs. I am interested in your career, and I am turning the tables on you, Prince Selflessness. I purpose to make your fortune by having you meet some men who are worth while meeting. One of them you know—Judge Witherspoon. Pardon me one moment!"

While she read a letter which the footman brought her, Mr. Ferguson sat the prey of conflicting emotions. He felt a wild impulse to tell her that he was not the babe in the woods she imagined him, but the System rose up in all its majesty and sternly faced his rebellious Ego.

Said the System to the Ego: "What am I for if you intend to flout me like this?"

Answered the Ego: "I flouted you before, Sublime Mentor, and behold the wondrous fruits of my Unwisdom."

Quoth the System: "Because you had good luck with you once when you flouted me, do you imagine you can go on acting the sincere simpleton without coming to grief?"

Whispered the Ego: "I'll be good and do as you say."

Mrs. van Duyskuk turned to Matthew Ferguson, and he, returning from his wool-gathering, inquired:

"You are going to be my fairy godmother, is that it?"

"That's it."

"But," said Mr. Ferguson, "I have a logical mind and I delve back to first causes. Why, pray, do you interest yourself in me when there are thousands of other young men as deserving as myself?"

The old lady laughed adorably.

"You are delectable," she said. "And you are right. Over and above, or rather, beneath the surface reason I have that I like you for yourself, lies a subterranean reason."

"Construe, I beseech you," said Matthew Ferguson. "What does a fairy godmother do as a rule for her protégé?"

"Gives him of her riches, splendor, fine raiment, a palace——"

"An *empty* palace?"

"Prince or princess goes with it, as a rule."

Mrs. van Duyskuk rose, and extended her hand to him in token of dismissal.

"That is precisely the point. A princess goes with the palace. I am tired now, and must send you away."

And Mr. Ferguson walked down the stairs and out of the house as lightly and swiftly, as if, like Mercury, he had wings on his heels to speed him on his way.

A dinner invitation came the next day for the following Friday. Mr. Ferguson was more excited by the prospect of meeting the "men who can be of use to you" than he cared to own. He thought also, at considerable length, of the women he would meet at Mrs. van Duyskuk's. Her words held an element that worried him vaguely. If she helped him onward in expectation that he would marry the girl she selected for him, she would, undoubtedly, undo what she had done to help him upon discovering that he refused to be party to any but a love-match. He held irrevocably to his determination to marry whom he chose. His Ego wanted it and the Adamantine System approved of the decision, since it involved his "motive power."

The evening of the dinner came at last. He had a bad half hour in dressing. His new evening shoes were too tight for comfort, his pearl shirt studs rolled into unexplorable regions behind the bureau, his tie would not come right, and to cap the climax he mislaid the

handkerchief which he had succeeded in inoculating with precisely the right quantity of attar of roses, after despoiling all the other handkerchiefs he owned; being a non-smoker, like many other men in the same category, he liked perfume and had a sweet tooth.

Finally, after a great deal of preliminary agony, he found himself in Mrs. van Duyskuk's drawing-room. He was the last of the fifteen guests to arrive, and it was only after they were seated at table, and he had time to disentangle the different men and women to whom he had been introduced, that he fully realized just what Mrs. van Duyskuk was doing for him, in asking him to this small dinner party, which represented the double cream of the Empire City's society and wealth.

There was, first of all, Judge Witherspoon, comfortable and high-bred, always a host in himself, who had greeted Mr. Ferguson, as he entered the room, with a friendly nod and a "How d'ye do, Ferguson," as if he were an insider of that charmed circle. There was Adam Cravatt, President of the Interstate Railway Company, a smooth, smug, pompous gentleman with side whiskers and a pallid complexion. There were Thoreau Beecham, President of the Eastern and Western Railway company, a small, nervous, fretful, brittle-tempered man, and Eldon Furlow, chairman of the new independent political party of which so much was expected in the coming campaign. This gentleman was so obese that he could not sit in an armchair, or on one of the cane-bottomed dinner chairs. A huge, Colonial chair had been provided for him, and he spilled himself exuberantly on both sides of it. The fat lay about his wrists in huge bolsters. Matthew Ferguson reflected that, dressed as a baby, he would have brought down any vaudeville house without as much as opening his mouth. He was slightly ungrammatical and extremely slangy,

and Mr. Ferguson marveled that he should be admitted to Mrs. van Duyskuk's select circle. He racked his brains to remember certain facts from "Who's Who." Suddenly his memory clicked. The two railroad presidents and Eldon Furlow were the chief stockholders of the New York and Europe Steamship Company, of which Judge Witherspoon held a considerable, but not a controlling, share.

At table Mr. Ferguson sat between the daughters of the respective railroad presidents. He had taken in Grace Cravatt, a wholesome, pretty, young blonde, with a frightened, shy manner. Alison Beecham sat at his other side, and beyond her sat the obese monster.

Alison Beecham was the exact antithesis in manner and looks of her short, nervous father. She wore her black hair with the same floating drapery effect as her clothes. Face and figure looked like an El Greco come to life, and her abnormal length and attenuation were further accentuated by the way in which she wore her clothes. On second thought Matthew Ferguson concluded she looked more like a siren on a French candy box than an El Greco. There seemed to him something innately vulgar about her, in spite of her fine manner and wonderful clothes.

Truth to tell, he was a little troubled by the sparkle of diamonds, the gossamer gowns, the glistening shoulders of the women among whom he sat. Very different this from Utrecht society, and Mr. Ferguson had never seen such an assemblage of ultra-modishly gowned women except at long range in a drawing-room play on the stage, or at still longer range in the stalls of the horseshoe at the opera.

"Some day," he said to himself, "I will choose my wife from among these," and then, remembering Mrs. van Duyskuk's parting remark on the occasion of his

first and last visit, fire mounted to his brow. Was the girl she wanted him to marry present? Was it Alison Beecham, by any chance? Was it Grace Cravatt?

He examined his neighbors with new interest. Just as he turned to glance furtively at Alison, she began to talk to him.

"I suppose you know you are the lion of the hour. Do tell me about yourself—I love to hear lions roar."

"Then why not take a trip to the Park menagerie after dinner?" he responded coolly. Her patronizing air angered him.

"Thank you. I prefer human lions to the variety they keep at the Park."

"I am delighted to afford you entertainment."

"You have not done so, so far. I have done the most talking."

"Have you? I haven't a yard-stick ready, so I cannot tell whether your statement is correct or not."

"Oh—always accept as correct a statement made by a woman."

"By all means, in the drawing-room, where they are of small account, but not in court, where statements matter."

Mr. Ferguson knew that he was unwarrantably rude, and he could not have said why he was rude. He only knew that this girl irritated him, and her cool air of aloof superiority vexed him unaccountably.

She fixed the gaze of her limpid, black eyes upon him, and asked sweetly and languidly:

"I suppose your experience in the drawing-room is as great as in the court-room, isn't it, Mr. Ferguson?"

He turned and looked at her, took in every detail of the attenuated figure in its artistic, diaphanous draperies. Was this the girl Mrs. van Duyskuk had selected for him? Ye gods!

He laughed. He felt quite at home suddenly. Why should this silly, patronizing, vapid girl awe him, Matthew Ferguson? Why, indeed?

"Well, what do you think?" he parried. "You think me rude, of course. And so I am. Perhaps I have a notion that women despise men who pay them compliments. Perhaps I am making a bid for your esteem on that theory."

"Clever chap!" she said lightly. Again that patronizing, impertinent air that sent the blood to his head.

"Is that the best you can do in the way of a retort?" he inquired politely.

She did not answer, but looked toward him, around him, past him, looked every way except directly at him. On her lips was a malicious, sly smile that proclaimed as plainly as words her belief that, if she chose to exert herself, her shafts of wit would crush completely his little ineffectual attempts at repartee.

"Come," he said, "haven't you one word to throw at—a lion?"

"The lion growls so fiercely that he frightens me."

"The lion told you before that he growled to please his audience. Don't blame the poor beast for doing what he thought was expected of him."

"Clever chap!"

"That's the second time, Miss Beecham, that you have used the same word of laudation in five minutes."

"Well, you see, lion, I am naturally lazy, and hate to exert myself. So I have neat little stock expressions ready with which to interlard other people's monologues, to make them think the monologue is a duet."

Matthew Ferguson laughed.

"I don't believe you are lazy at all, or, if you are, you do not think me worth while exerting yourself for."

"Ingrate! Didn't I exert myself just now?"

"No! It was a spontaneous flow of natural wit."

"Dear me," she sighed. "And I thought at the beginning of this entertaining séance that I was going to like you."

"I deduce that you have changed your mind? May I inquire why?"

She looked him straight in the eye, and spoke in her usual stealthy, lazy, cat-like way.

"I like a man when I'm reasonably sure he is not going to make love to me the third time we meet."

"Perhaps you prefer him to make love to you the first time you meet!"

"I was too specific. I meant to say that I like a man who *never* makes love to me."

"If lack of affection for yourself is the means of enjoying your favor, I think I can promise myself that I will retain it."

He saw that she winced—almost imperceptibly—and her eyes glittered dangerously when she looked up at him. She seemed more like a crouching cat than ever.

"I wouldn't make any rash promises," she said carelessly.

"I never do," he responded, coolly.

"Are you going to come and see me?"

"Do you want me to?"

"Among my friends it is considered better form to reply to a woman's invitation to call with 'If I may.'"

"But I, my dear Miss Beecham, have a weakness for appearing original. I could not possibly lower my criterion to comply with the habit of stock expressions common among yourself and your friends."

"Oh!" He saw that he had made her catch her breath at last. She regained her composure quickly and swept her languid eyes over him appraisingly.

"Yes, you are credited with being original. Even to

your clothes. It's the first time you've been seen in New York in a suit that is not brown, is it not?"

"Can I help myself?" he asked.

"A man as original as yourself, I should think, would not stick at so small a matter as the color of his evening clothes."

"If that is a challenge," he retorted, "I will promise to make the innovation of appearing in a Tuxedo or full-dress suit of brown any evening you may see fit to invite me to dinner or ball, provided you will instruct your servants to admit me."

"It's a bargain!" Alison's eyes blinked cat-fashion. "When will you begin? Next week?"

"Oh, give my tailor time to construct the innovation! I fancy I will have to devote an hour a week to talking him into the adventurous undertaking."

"Very well. When the innovation is ready, let me know. However, I must tell you that I sail for Europe ten days hence."

"Miss Beecham, you haven't the courage of a mouse. You're backing out. Are you afraid the butler will refuse to buttle for, or the waiter to wait upon, or the cook to cook for a man in brown evening clothes?"

"How you misunderstand me! In September, when we return, the invitation will be forthcoming. If you appear in black, I reserve the right to think of you what I please."

She bent forward suddenly. Matthew thought her fangs were drawn, but, vixen that she was, she was only reaching out her tentacles of discomfort toward another victim.

"Dear Grace," she murmured, and as Miss Cravatt, whom Mr. Ferguson had taken in to dinner, leaned forward, Alison said lightly:

"I've been monopolizing your partner in a shameful

way. Haven't I? Why is it that other girls' partners are always more interesting than our own, even than themselves, when they happen to be our own?"

"Forbidden fruit," murmured Mr. Ferguson.

Alison,.beyond flushing lightly at the temples, gave no sign of having heard. She continued to address Grace.

"And this time you warned me, didn't you, Grace, that you would brook no interference? Well, try your luck with him. He just told me that he will never fall in love with me. Perhaps he'll be thoughtful enough to warn you off the premises also." And, turning quickly, she began jabbering away to Furlow, who, seated just beyond her, was masticating assiduously.

Poor little Miss Cravatt had turned a pretty scarlet under the Gatling gun attack of her friend.

"What must you think of me, Mr. Ferguson?" she began, indignantly. "I never said anything of the sort to Alison. I mean—what she hinted at—I mean—I mean——"

"I'm quite sure you didn't," said Matthew soothingly. "I'm certain you didn't." All his manliness, all the protective instinct of the male for the woman in distress, was aroused by the sight of Grace's dismay. "Still, being a mere man, I cannot truthfully say that I regret Miss Beecham should have indulged herself in such manifest untruths, for are not her malicious falsehoods the cause for your charming color? And let me say, Miss Cravatt, it is not every girl that can blush with impunity."

"Oh!" said little Miss Cravatt shyly, "I didn't mean you to infer that Alison is untruthful. She is just—mischievous, you know."

"Do you know," said Matthew Ferguson with confidential gravity, "the same identical thought has occurred to me."

They looked at each other and little Miss Cravatt, who was by no means a fool, burst out laughing. She looked so pretty and charming as she laughed, now that her embarrassment had faded, that it was a great wonder that Matthew did not fall in love with her then and there.

But he didn't. He liked her well enough to be quite angry with Alison for harassing the timid little creature, and he determined to punish Alison later for her spitefulness. He reflected that he might derive considerable pleasure from inflicting oral chastisement on so high-strung a creature as Alison Beecham.

"Though," he continued, "as Miss Beecham fibbed, I am sorry to think you may be disappointed in my conversation. If I am stupid to-night, you must forgive me."

"Oh!" Miss Cravatt, the young man noted, had a fondness for that simple expletive. "Oh! You must not think I am not glad to speak to you. I hope I wasn't rude. Indeed, indeed, Mr. Ferguson, I must tell you what I think of you!"

He looked at her in silent amazement.

"It was so wonderfully fine of you to do what you did!" She continued with pretty eagerness. "Mrs. van Duyskuk says the Judge told her that some of those Jewish women knelt down in the street when you passed out of the courthouse and kissed your hands, and your garments, the very stones you trod on! Oh, it was splendid of you—it was like the Gracchi—like Coriolanus —it was magnificent!"

Matthew Ferguson experienced the most singular sensations. Never in all his life had he felt so exquisitely ashamed. He felt like an impostor who receives adulations not rightfully his. The oil of homage that this

sincere, impressionable young woman was pouring out at his feet was as brimstone and fire.

"You exaggerate what I have done," he said, speaking with difficulty. At the same moment, by chance, he caught Mrs. van Duyskuk's eye. There was a curious expression in the old lady's face, and the scales dropped from Matthew Ferguson's eyes. Grace Cravatt was the princess whom she meant to bestow upon him—little Grace Cravatt, who, from what he knew of the character of both women, was doubtless a prime favorite of the old lady's.

"You exaggerate the importance of what I did," he repeated nervously. "Those Greek and Roman chaps were really heroes—warriors, you know, who risked life and fortune in serving the people. I am nothing but a little tuppeny lawyer, who gave a little of his time in filing a protest against inhumanity."

But, in her shy, maidenly way, she insisted upon treating him like a hero. When she looked at him with her large, gray eyes, it was with deference and with homage. And Matthew Ferguson, whose intuition allowed him to look deep into that pure woman's soul, felt abashed and ashamed at what he glimpsed there.

He was glad when dinner was over. The Judge touched him familiarly on the shoulder.

"We older men are going to the smoking-room to talk shop for a few minutes," he said. "We shall be glad to have you join us."

Mr. Ferguson thanked him, and the Judge led the way. The men whom they found lolling in the smoking-room were enjoying, in silence, huge black Havana cigars, with the exception of Thoreau Beecham, who was smoking a cigarette. Matthew Ferguson, as he entered the apartment, and caught sight of Beecham, Cravatt and Furlow, knew that the Judge had brought him

hither to be judged by the high tribunal. He was in the presence of the men who were such tremendous factors in the financial well-being of the State that they were usually referred to as "the Powers."

"Have a see-gah!" Falstaffian Furlow, his starched shirt-front creaking ominously—Mr. Ferguson wondered that the abundant adipose tissue of the gentleman did not oil the creaking hinges of that shirt front—handed him the jar.

"Thank you. I do not smoke."

"Hm," said Furlow, deliberately, "I don't think much of men who don't."

"Well, you see," said Matthew Ferguson easily, "I am afraid I would not think well if I did." The retort created a mild, perfunctory amusement. "I find my brain a somewhat valuable appurtenance, and I humor it."

Furlow grunted out an unintelligible reply, and Matthew, seating himself in a corner of the huge sofa, looked as indifferent as possible.

The two railroad men began voicing their grievances. Much of what he heard Matthew Ferguson knew. Much, also, was new to him. He was aware of a sort of dual consciousness. The one half of his brain listened attentively to the discussion. The other half made marginal notes, criticized, differed, annotated. Mr. Ferguson possessed in an unusual degree the gift of improvisation, a gift which is the vitalizing spark, the leaven, the yeast for the legal mind. His legal paraphernalia was in exceedingly good order. What was within the law, what without, he knew to a nicety and at a moment's notice, and a grain of the divine powder was always in readiness to ignite the tinder box and set in motion a first-class conflagration.

He listened in silence. Once the Judge glanced toward him. Cravatt, who had been doing most of the

talking, in a very pompous, heavy way, finally wound up with:

"We have spent millions of dollars in lobbying, and what have we accomplished. We cannot discriminate in favor of the big shipper—by giving him lower rates, and we cannot discriminate in his favor by giving him rebates. What are we going to do about it?"

Matthew Ferguson became aware that all eyes were focussed upon him. In the Judge's face was written an invitation to speak, and Mr. Ferguson said composedly:

"There is one thing you have not tried."

"That is?"

"It will cost you a pretty penny to inaugurate this method of beating the devil around the bush. But, if my legal opinion is worth anything, the Federal authorities, short of amending the Constitution, will be powerless to interfere with you, if you try these means of giving the big men a better rate than the small fry."

"You interest me exceedingly," said Grace's father.

"You have on your shipping receipts a clause, I believe, disclaiming liability for delay in the delivery of goods. If you have no such clause, you should incorporate it immediately. Then, you make it a point to deliver the big fellow's freight as quickly as possible, but the stuff of the small fry you accidentally delay. You repeat this again and again. The small chap is in despair. What to do? You issue special delivery stamps, taking your cue from the postoffice, and charge for these stamps at the rate of so and so much per pound. Do you get me?"

"Gawd!" bawled Furlow, "and none of you fellers had enough gumption to think of a simple thing like that! Gawd! what's the use of paying a corporation counsel wages that make the salary of the President of the United States look sick, I'd like to know, if he can't

think out a plain little plan like that for himself! Gawd! What a plan!"

"Mr. Ferguson," said Mr. Cravatt, pompously, "you have no objection to our profiting by this idea when we get ready to use it?"

"None in the world, sir. Plenty more ideas where that one came from."

"I believe you, Mr. Ferguson," said Mr. Cravatt gravely. "I believe you. There is another thing that has been troubling us lately." He paused for a moment, then resumed. "You are aware, I dare say, that everyone present, except yourself, is interested largely in the New York and Europe Steamship Company."

"I am aware of that, yes."

"The Alpha Steamship Company has harassed us unceasingly ever since we lost the 'Pilgrim' two years ago. Their advertisements and circular matter are continual reminders of our lamentable misfortune. How can we get back at them?"

Matthew Ferguson regarded the tip of his exquisite boot reflectively.

"The subject matter is new to me," he said and, even as he spoke, he was aware that his mind, trained to prompt service, was coördinating, arranging, systematizing a myriad of seemingly irrelevant facts. "It may be that I will have to think this over," he said, but he was quite certain that he would know how to deal with the problem within another five minutes. "Yet I am sure that I can find a way for you. Ah!" He stopped a minute to luxuriate in the strained attention with which these multimillionaires were looking at him, the little tuppeny lawyer. "I believe I have it," he concluded, calmly.

"You interest me more than I can say," said Mr. Cravatt.

"If you've got a plan pat now, after two minutes' talk

on the subject," tinkled little Beecham, in a voice brittle with excitement, "you're all that you're cracked up to be, Mr. Matthew Ferguson, and you can count on——"

"Have a see-gah, Beecham," bellowed Furlow in a voice like a bull's. Matthew divined that this seeming irrelevance conveyed a warning of some sort to Thoreau Beecham, who, standing on one foot, screamed rather than spoke the words which were an answer to the Leviathan's offer of a cigar.

"Confound it, Furlow! It's too bad of you, really. You know I never smoke anything but cigarettes!"

Mr. Cravatt interposed composedly.

"Mr. Ferguson, you have the floor!"

Said Matthew Ferguson, allowing himself with each sentence a greater latitude in oratorical delivery and phrasing:

"This is June. It is a truism to add that summer is at hand. The steamships going to Europe are crowded with pleasure seekers; but, bent as these are on having a good time, the time is past when the man and woman to whom Providence has allotted a comfortable or a luxurious income gives no thought to those less fortunately circumstanced. Gentlemen, the average man and woman, you will agree with me, is kind to his or her dependents."

He paused, waited for corroboration, which came in the form of nods and monosyllables, and continued airily.

"I am quite certain, for instance, that your servants, Mr. Cravatt, and yours, Mr. Beecham, are better housed than the family of the average fifteen hundred a year clerk."

Both gentlemen again nodded, and Furlow thundered:

"What's the matter with my servants, young man?"

"You're a bachelor, I believe, Mr. Furlow, so I imagine you have a suite in some hotel. Am I right?"

Furlow grunted without replying, and Matthew continued.

"This kindness is extended when traveling to the servants who minister to the immediate wants of the traveler. It would be extended to others who have an infinitely harder time of it than the stewards and sailors, if the passengers knew of them. I speak of the stokers."

"What in all the world are you driving at?" roared Furlow, rolling about in the huge chair in which he lay rather than sat like a ballastless rowboat in a heavy sea.

"Yes, really, it's too bad of you!" shrilled little Beecham. "You get on my nerves, young man. You get on my nerves horribly." And he lit another cigarette.

"I am driving at this." Matthew Ferguson's tone was no longer rhetorical; it was crisp, brisk, business-like. "Do you know that the heat in the dark hole where they stoke is so intolerable in summer that more than half the stokers refuse to return to the vessels after June the first? Do you know that? Do you?" He shot the question, exclusive of the Judge, individually at each of the men, who, one and all, were watching him with the fascinated, slightly uncomfortable curiosity of the layman who hopes to profit by the professional mind's incomprehensible trapezing. The Judge alone was watching him with the joyous understanding which comes to one professional brain taking cognizance of the conduct of another equally fine professional organ in full action. Matthew Ferguson sensed the tribute which the older man generously paid him, and the knowledge of it filled him with elation.

To hold master minds of the law, of finance, and of politics spellbound like this! Ah, it was intoxication!

With a rising inflection in his voice, Mr. Ferguson resumed.

"And do you know to what means the steamship com-

panies are forced to resort to obtain stokers to stoke in the insufferable, hellish atmosphere of the furnace rooms during the summer months? They pay agents, ostensibly to hire the men for them, but in reality it is understood that the agents shanghai the men—yes, sir, club them into insensibility as they pass along deserted downtown streets early in the morning, or late at night. They are then picked up, brought aboard as drunk and clapped under hatches. When the poor wretch who has been thus 'hired' awakens, he finds the ship on the high seas, himself in a dingy, grimy cubbyhole of a place, with a hole in his head and a slave driver standing over him with the rough command, to 'get up, you lazy loafer, and do what you agreed to do—stoke!' "

Mr. Ferguson had the satisfaction of noting that his small audience was listening attentively.

"The poor devil, of course, has no recollection of an agreement, for there is none, but he, a novice at the work and with an open wound in his head more frequently than not, is driven to do the work which the experienced hands with uninjured bodies have abandoned because of its devilishness. If he demurs, he is driven to it with blows——"

Little Beecham sprang from his chair, bouncing up like a rubber ball.

"Mr. Ferguson, all this may be true," he shouted, "but I swear, and I am willing to do so on the Book, that I know nothing of it."

"One moment," said pompous Mr. Cravatt, hastily, and with evident alarm, "is our line implicated?"

"As far as I know all lines are implicated," said Mr. Ferguson. "It seems to be a case of sixes and sevens. The facts came to my knowledge through the Delikatessen Frau where my landlady deals. Her son was shanghaied a short time ago. His shanghaiing brought

to light half a dozen similar cases among her poorer customers. All lines, I repeat, are culpable."

"Perhaps," growled Furlow, "perhaps, young feller, you'll be good enough to come to the point at last. What are you driving at?"

"At this, Mr. Furlow," Mr. Ferguson said curtly. "My plan is that your line procure stokers in a legitimate way. Pay twice or thrice the usual rate to get them, give them short hours and decent berths to sleep in. It's an outlay, of course, but charge it to advertising promotion, not to payroll. You'll get all you need. Then, to show your humanitarian instincts, you offer a handsome prize, say of five or ten thousand dollars, to the engineer who will devise the most satisfactory contrivance for lightening the stokers' work. This is the first week in June. You can get your scheme in working order in a fortnight. It will create a lot of talk, and you will get page upon page of free advertising from the newspapers. Meanwhile, acting independently of you, of course, I will go to work, get together a dozen cases or so against the Alpha Line, and bring suit against it. I'll arrange not to have the cases tried before the cool weather is here, so that we will be certain of a full house in the court-room. Of course, once the suit is brought, it is going to make ducks and drakes of the Alpha Line's business, for public sentiment is a strong factor, and, as I said before, particularly among women, feeling for the lower classes is the fashion."

"Damme," roared Furlow, "and not one of you fellers had enough gumption——"

Little Beecham was hopping up and down, outshouting the Leviathan.

"What's the matter with yourself?" he screamed. "You're big enough to do your own thinking, aren't you? It's too bad of you, really."

Furlow subsided, grunting horribly. Then he turned to Matthew.

"Young feller, what do you expect to get out of this?"

"A good deal, you may be sure," said Mr. Ferguson calmly.

There was a rapid interchange of looks between the four men. Then Mr. Cravatt put in heavily:

"Mr. Ferguson, the present counsel for our allied railroads and steamship company, Mr. Evers, is a very sick man. We cannot demand his resignation at this moment, for he has been a faithful servant for many years. But we can offer to make you his assistant, a position we are creating for you, with the understanding that you succeed Mr. Evers upon his death, which is bound to occur within a very few months. You will, in the meantime, receive the same salary as Mr. Evers, if you accept. Does the proposition meet with your approval?"

Whatever nectar of joy Mr. Ferguson tasted at this quick and easy triumph, he showed no outward elation. His reply came very coldly, very quietly, as if the offer to be made corporation counsel for two of the largest Eastern roads were an everyday occurrence with him.

"Yes, it is quite satisfactory. But there is one drawback. You realize, of course, that for at least a year it must not become known that I am your counsel, or the moral effect upon public opinion of the shanghai suits against the Alpha Line will be lost."

He spoke of the shanghai suits as if they were an accomplished fact. To him they were even now actual entities. He could see that the railroad magnates regarded him with subtle admiration. They acquiesced in his suggestion, little Beecham remarking that the salary would go into effect at once, starting with the first of that month.

"We consider, Mr. Ferguson, that you have earned

your salary even now," Mr. Cravatt remarked tranquilly.

Mr. Ferguson assured him that he was flattered by the good opinion which he and Mr. Beecham entertained of him, but the wan smile which accompanied the words belied them, and indicated that he was not flattered in the least, and that he said what he said merely because he was a polite young man. Mr. Ferguson, it will be observed, being possessed of considerable sagacity, did not believe in allowing anyone to think that good fortune surprised him, or that he considered it in any other light than a just desert.

The Judge, who had smothered a desire to laugh throughout, was prodigiously entertained by the little comedy. Placing his hand upon his protégé's shoulder, he suggested that it was time to break up the conference, and in that attitude of touching affection the two legal lights led the procession as it filed back into the parlors.

Before the party broke up for the night, the lady of the house contrived to navigate Mr. Ferguson into a secluded corner of her handsome rooms.

"I have decoyed you to this secret nook," she said, whimsically, "because I am eager to hear what has happened. Have they made you an offer?"

"They have, fairy godmother," replied Mr. Ferguson, and he told her what it was, and enjoined secrecy upon her.

"Capital, capital," she cried, eyeing him admiringly. "All will come to the happy conclusion for which I hope."

"All?"

"All. For the princess captured your fancy, or I am much mistaken."

Matthew Ferguson became very grave.

"Dear godmother," he said gently, "there were two princesses."

"Dear godson," she retorted. "This is the first time I have known you to be insincere. You know very well which was the princess, and which the foil."

"A dangerous foil," murmured Mr. Ferguson. "I wish the foil had been the princess."

"Ah! That means?"

"That I would then be in a position to tell you frankly that Alison Beecham is the last woman in the world whom I would select as a—" he hesitated a moment, and then added, "mate."

"And why 'mate' instead of wife?"

"Because to me 'mate' means so much more than 'wife.' A man's wife, what is she only too often? A tawdry bit of showiness, squandering his money, wasting her time, leaving his children to hired servants, if, indeed, he has been fortunate enough to induce her to have offspring. A man's mate is his help-mate, his true love, his companion, his friend, and, in return, he is all that to her, and more, if he is a man in the true sense of the word. He is her protector, her guide, her staff, her provider. And their children, which are received in gladness and in joy, are theirs indeed, and not merely his or hers."

"That is all very pretty," said Mrs. van Duyskuk gently. "And a wife who complies with your demands, take my word for it, is little Gr——"

"Hush," said Matthew Ferguson quickly, "do not let us bandy her name between us."

Mrs. van Duyskuk chuckled.

"Have you the hardihood, after that, to tell me that you are not in the least interested in her?"

Matthew Ferguson remained silent for a moment. Then he spoke earnestly.

"Let us understand each other, my dear lady. I am extremely grateful to you for what you have done for me, and I am deeply in your debt for introducing me to

Adam Cravatt and Thoreau Beecham. But, in the matter of my marriage, I must follow my own inclinations and my own desires and devises."

He stopped, fearing that he had been emphatic to the point of brusqueness, and, to do him justice, he thought at the moment only of the churlishness of giving offense to the dainty old lady and not of the possible effect upon his own career of that offense. But she spoke lightly.

"You are high-spirited, and, of course, will do your own choosing. But I wanted you to know that your choosing, in a certain direction, would not be unwelcome."

"You should not have told me," he burst out. "It is not fair to the woman to tell the man of whom she has made a demi-god. No man is worthy of it, you know."

The old lady laid her delicate old hand gently upon his. It was a beautiful hand, in spite of its age and its wrinkles, for neither age nor wrinkles had spoiled the exquisite contours of the fingers, and the blue veins, lying in tiny ridges, seemed to add to its charm. Her voice was gently modulated, as she replied:

"The man who is really unworthy does not feel his unworthiness. And it was fair to the woman, in your case, which, I grant, is one in a thousand. The man who is not a gentleman, when he learns that a woman has made him her hero, her beau-ideal, her god, may swagger and sniff, and swear to himself—and others—that the woman who bestows her love unasked is not worthy of any honest man's love. But the man who is a gentleman—I think I need not tell you how he feels."

"He feels like the devil," said Matthew Ferguson. "Oh, my dear, dear lady, I desire above all things to make my position clear to you."

"You have other ties?" she asked swiftly.

"Not a single one, not even one of recollection. Like every normal man, I have looked forward expectantly to the day when I would marry a woman I love. But, unlike most men, I have not beguiled the time of waiting by giving chase to other women. I have waited, not eagerly, not impatiently, but with a sincere desire to prepare myself by building a nest that may be worthy of her.

"Understand me. There has been no woman in my life. There has been not even the image of a woman whom, in imagination or desire, I have coveted. My mind, my imagination are as virgin as my person is clean. I look forward to a love-marriage as the high adventure of my life. Ambition, money, a career—to me they seem the accompaniment merely of the true import of life. Like most men, I do not expect always to come from the money-market with clean hands. I do not expect it, I do not hope it, I do not even pretend that I shall. But in that one particular, in my love and in my marriage I will be *sans peur et sans reproche*. And because I have kept myself clean in body and soul, virgin in mind and imagination, I have always believed that, when the girl I am destined to love walks into my life, I would know her as mine at a glance.

"I have felt that something within me, instinct if you will, or intuition, or soul, in some way, would give me a token by which I would know her, and, unless I am entirely wrong in this belief, I have not yet met her."

Mrs. van Duyskuk regarded him curiously, a little demure smile hovering at the corners of her mouth.

"Keep your belief a while longer, my lad. Youth loves to believe in violent effects and in sensational beginnings. Age grounds its faith in propinquity and suitability. We will see."

On reaching home in the small hours of the morning,

Matthew Ferguson fell into a light, troubled slumber, from which he awoke as the milk wagons rattled past the door. Further sleep was impossible and, after taking his matutinal sponge-bath, he sat down at the window to think matters over.

He had virtually conquered the Empire City, and his conquest, equally without doubt, was even more spectacular and sensational than, in his wildest dreams of success, he had hoped it would be. At one leap he had propelled himself into the lap of the invincible American aristocracy. He looked about his room, which was comfortable and cozy enough, and it suddenly seemed shabby and insufficient. It would now behoove him, the attorney of the two big Eastern roads, to move into a better neighborhood, and to become a tenant of more elaborate apartments, unless, indeed, it would be advisable for the Champion of the Poor to continue to live in a room carpeted with a threadbare rug, furnished with a bureau whose mirror was cracked, and having a stationary washstand, from which all the glazing was gone.

He thought of Grace Cravatt. Without a doubt it was within his power to ally himself by marriage with one of the powerful, rich families of America, not one of the mushroom rich, but one of those families who, with a comfortable array of three generations of millionaires back of them, and because they are related by marriage to half a dozen other equally happily situated families, are practically immune against financial disaster, since self-interest bids those others protect every twig and branch of the tree of which they are a part.

The temptation was great to dally with thoughts of the sweet, shy little girl, marriage with whom would admit him to the magic temple of the Four Hundred. Her father might to-day refuse to let his daughter marry a little tuppenny lawyer, but the tuppenny lawyer had a

formidable brain, and in a year or two it was doubtful whether even Adam Cravatt would care to refuse him his daughter.

Matthew Ferguson had no intention in the world of succumbing to temptation, but the sorceress was clad in rosy-hued garments, she was bedizened with brass farthings that glimmered like gold, and it was pleasant to see her dance and beckon and make a thousand alluring promises.

Suddenly Matthew Ferguson became aware that a terrific turmoil was in progress with himself as the battlefield. System and Ego were at it again, and System was exceedingly wroth.

"You are not holding up your end of the game," said System.

"I wonder," queried Ego, indignantly, "what you know about my end of the game, anyhow?"

"I know this much, that's certain. I've hacked out a wonderful plan, and I am scheming and slaving day and night to make you happy. And here you are, getting ready to tumble all my plodding and planning in the dust."

"What are you growling about?" Ego inquired, impertinently polite.

"I am blaming you for butting into my business, which is to serve you. All I ask of you is to please yourself, in the great particular of life. For if you do not please yourself in that, there is no earthly use in my going on, since I have created myself out of nothing only to be your good genius, to serve you and to do for you. But you have got to keep out of my way. You have got to choose your wife where you will, and have your own way, and be happy in your marriage. Otherwise I refuse to work."

"Well, that is definite, at any rate. You admit, I be-

lieve, that I am your master and you are my slave, System?"

"Ego, I do. But let me tell you that you have an exceedingly brutal way of putting it."

"Well, then, my pretty little Infallible System, let *me* tell *you* that, in the first place, you are a very impertinent slave, and, in the second place, I have no intention of not pleasing myself. And now go, if you please, and strictly mind your own business."

Matthew Ferguson laughed. Mechanically his hand sought for an article lying under the pincushion on his bureau. It was a timetable for St. Agnes-on-the-Falls.

"I need a dose of Amanda's and Andrew's stout common sense," he said. "I believe I can make the seven fifty-five."

He had spent more than one week-end with the Harts during the past year, and he found the wholesome companionship of the sensible doctor and his wife, whom Matthew now voted charming, delightful.

He jumped up, and, dragging his dress-suit case out from under the bed, began throwing stockings, shirts, underwear, and a flannel suit of buff into it pell-mell. In less than fifteen minutes he had completed this remarkable packing and was on his way to the depot.

## CHAPTER V

### *In Which Matthew Ferguson Meets Fate—with a Capital F*

Matthew Ferguson's telegram must have conveyed cause of alarm of some sort, for Cousin Amanda, who had come to meet him, had plentifully supplied the automobile in which she had come with large, flaccid-looking pillows, which seemed calculated to conduce to the comfort of an invalid or a very aged person. Alarm and anxiety were impressed upon every line of her plain, kindly face. In her hand Matthew Ferguson believed he detected a smelling-salts bottle.

Of course, he took the situation in at a glance—cushioned automobile, alarm, and smelling-salts, and, making a dash for the side of the depot, stood behind a sheltering pile of trunks, and, sad to relate, had the heartlessness to indulge himself in a prolonged and hearty spasm of uncontrollable laughter, to the evident concern of the baggage-master. Then, once more controlling himself, he sallied forth, and, with a very solemn face, accosted his cousin, whose look of passive alarm had turned into one of frenzied anxiety as the last parlor car passenger dismounted without bringing to light the one whom she was expecting.

"Here I am, Cousin Amanda," he said.

"Cousin Matthew," she gasped, "surely, you, a sick man, did not travel in the day-coach? And, surely, you

should not be carrying that suit-case!" Amanda made an ineffectual dash for it, and Matthew was reduced to the ignominy of engaging in a hand to hand scuffle with a lady, in order to retain possession of the wretched thing. "Put it down," she said, angrily. "Men have no sense at all. Not a bit. Is there no porter about? You are looking fairly well—there is no excuse for not having a porter here for this train—a man about to go under the knife should not be carrying a heavy case like that—porter, porter; oh, it's a trainman—Andrew has been very much worried about you—is it very urgent—the operation—I mean. We have been so concerned to think of you alone on the train—and, what is the trouble, Matthew?"

"I hate to tell you, Amanda," he said, somberly.

"Nonsense," snapped Amanda. "I am a doctor's wife, your cousin, and at least eighteen years your senior. Out with it."

"Well, if I must tell you, I must. I am afraid I am suffering from elephantiasis of the cranium, Amanda, and I want Andrew to remove the swelling."

For one moment Amanda stared at Matthew with a blank face. Then she laughed until the tears came.

"You silly, silly boy," she said, finally. "And there is poor Andrew at home, waiting anxiously for me to tell him whether he is to operate upon you for appendicitis, for tumor, or cancer. I am going to punish you, you absurd child, by kissing you. I have never had a son, Matthew, but if we had been blessed with one, I should have wanted him to be just such an imp as yourself."

Before she could reach up to kiss him he had stooped and kissed her.

"No life like the rural life, after all," said Matthew, as they started up the hill. And with great pathos he began declaiming; "'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.' Do you know, Amanda, when I was a boy I

thought curfews were herbs, or flowers, or some kind of mysterious plant. Aren't you taking me a wrong way?"

"No," said Amanda. "I am taking you a different way."

Matthew Ferguson lapsed into silence. They had entered a road so beautifully kept that he guessed it to be a private driveway. Foliage trees of every description stood about them in sweet-scented confusion. Elms, willows, oak, pine, and tulip trees were crowded together so thickly that the light of day was completely obscured by their luxuriant foliage. Although it was noon, and the day a sunny one, the road for at least half a mile was almost invisible in the twilight. The rich, moldy, black earth was moist with the steady drip-drip from the trees, and the huge trunks of the forest giants were black with the humus. Not a breeze stirred; neither wind nor light could penetrate this leafy fastness.

"Gad, what a place," murmured Matthew. An uncanny sensation crept over him—the feeling that some tragedy had been enacted here in the past or would be enacted here in the future. His nerves, unduly tense from the night's vigil, seemed to project him into that future, to connect him irrevocably in some way with the tragedy to come. It semed to him that for years he had been traversing the strange, darkling bit of road; that his entire life had converged toward this spot. A horrible nervousness shook him; a desire to abandon himself to the inertia that besieged him, to lie down under those moist, black, drip-dripping trees and wait—simply wait for the tragedy which was to take place here, and which, in some way, would impinge upon his own life.

He grappled with the unwholesome thought and shook it off. He spoke because he felt a violent desire to hear his own strong, vigorous voice. He asked:

"Why did you not bring me this way before?" But he meant: "Why did you bring me this way to-day?"

Amanda pointed to an opening in the woods. Matthew, following the line indicated by her hand, caught a glimpse of glimmering water, of water so placid and unruffled that its bosom gave off the strange iridescence of perfectly sluggish water or oil.

"That," said Amanda, "is Diberto Pool. This is a private estate, and the former Lord of the Manor, as the villagers still term the owner of Diberto Manor, had shut off this part of the road, not wishing to use it himself or to have anyone else use it. He did not wish to be reminded of a tragedy that took place yonder. The old man, old Pietro Diberto, died a year ago, and the new owner had the road put into repair and opened it to the public."

"I knew it," exclaimed Matthew Ferguson under his breath. But the uncanny sensation of himself being involved in some way in a tragedy still to come did not leave him. It required all his force of will not to bend supinely before it.

The car emerged from the woods, leaped out into the sunshine-flooded country, and took an incline at a bound, like a living thing glad to escape from a haunted spot, and rolled smoothly over a wrinkleless road.

An exclamation of sheer joy escaped Mr. Ferguson. Some score of yards beyond a low stone wall sprang into view, and upon it, as far as the eye could reach, grew climbing plants of every description. Rambler roses there were, red as rubies, which formed a brilliant foil for purple clematis, the deep royal hue of which shaded into the paler glory of wistarias, putting forth a second bloom, as that vine sometimes will in hot, moist seasons. Beyond was a long stretch of manifold-complexioned honeysuckles, in the center of which was

cradled a bower of some sort, which, as the car approached, turned out to be a gatekeeper's lodge.

Matthew Ferguson begged his cousin to drive through the Manor grounds.

Amanda laughed delightedly.

"Not now, Cousin Matthew," she said. "Ah, there was method in my madness in bringing you this way!" And she told him that that evening, like every midsummer eve for years past, the Manor grounds were opened to the public, a small admission fee being charged. The sum thus obtained was turned over to the local hospital, the Dibertos themselves defraying the cost of the music and refreshments. Andrew, Amanda rambled on, would be heartily glad that Matthew was sound and well, and would, therefore, be able to act as escort in his place for Amanda, for Andrew resented that a popular entertainment should take him away from his Andalusian fowl.

"Has Andrew taken to poultry raising?" Matthew asked innocently.

Amanda laughed at his ignorance before explaining that Andalusian fowl presented the riddle of the Sphinx to eugenists. She quoted Andrew: "Whoever shall solve the riddle of Andalusian fowl shall have laid the cornerstone of eugenics as an exact science." Was Matthew interested in hearing more about Andalusian fowl? Matthew was not. He implored her to desist. It was sacrilege to talk of science and professions in such a spot as this. It was idyllic, glamorous, entrancing. And he wanted to hear more of the Dibertos, all about them, in fact.

"Well, you shall meet some of them to-night, not the young lord of the manor, for he is away, but——"

In turning a sharp corner of the road the automobile brushed against and locked wheels with a car coming in the opposite direction. The shock of the impact was

severe, and, although neither machine sustained any material damage, the occupants of both cars were badly shaken.

Amanda exhibited great excitement, and for the rest of the way it was impossible to deflect her thoughts into another channel. In vain her cousin asked various questions of her regarding the value of the Diberto estate, the tragedy of the pool, and so forth. She answered confusedly and drifted back into futile discussion of the accident which had almost befallen them.

Matthew was destined to further boredom at the hands of Andrew, who, without allowing him time to wash and brush up, once the joke his cousin had played on him had been explained, insisted on taking him to the sterilized fowl house which he had built since Matthew had last visited him. There was a tiny office attached, which, among other things, had a filing cabinet with a card-index for registering the pedigree of the fowl.

Matthew was in despair. He had come up to talk about himself, and here was Andrew entirely ignoring his claims as a guest, and talking without intermission about ill-smelling fowl which did not interest him in the least. Suddenly, while Andrew was holding forth, it occurred to Mr. Ferguson that the thing he wanted Andrew to do for him was being performed more effectually than he had expected. He burst out laughing and was forced to apologize for his untimely mirth.

The golden glory of the June afternoon was at its height as Matthew Ferguson helped Amanda to alight from the automobile at Diberto Manor. The entertainment was to be given on the enormous lawn in front of the Manor House, and Matthew was amazed by the beauty of the Colonial mansion, which, with gables innumerable and colonnaded wings that zigzagged in all directions, was an imposing structure indeed; and the

prodigious sweep of exquisitely kept lawn, only a part of which had been pressed into use for the entertainment, gave the mansion a fine perspective.

A small platform had been erected on the lower part of the lawn, and, as it had been painted green and was about two inches lower than the top of the box hedge, into which the framework that supported the platform had been ingeniously fitted, it gave the impression of roofing the hedge. A boy, acting as usher, showed them their seats and handed them a program.

Amanda, speaking rapidly, pointed out a dozen seats directly facing the platform which had been hedged off by a rope of hemlock.

"The family and its guests sit there," she said.

"I thought you said young Diberto was away from home."

"So he is, but the ladies are here, and the house is full of guests, as usual." Amanda's air of knowing proprietorship amused Matthew enormously. She imparted to every statement she uttered a flavor of servile possession. Thus might a serf have spoken of the family of his lord. Amanda began minutely describing the interior of the Manse to him, speaking in the same vein. Matthew Ferguson's amusement grew apace, until it was tinctured with contempt. He had thought better of Amanda than this.

A lady seated beside Amanda spoke to her, asking some question. Amanda, before replying, took time to whisper to Matthew Ferguson, while she pointed to the program.

"I see that Doris Diberto is going to sing. She had not definitely promised to do so last week, when I saw her."

There was nothing in that simple statement of fact to work the change of mood that occurred in Mr. Ferguson.

"Doris Diberto," he said, softly, musingly; "Doris Diberto, Doris Diberto!"

The Chinese lanterns, provided for the evening and swinging from ropes suspended between poles all the way across the lawn, seemed to stir rhythmically to the magic of that name. The sound of the wind, stirring in the trees, muttered it. A cricket hidden somewhere in a thick growth of box and mistaking the dense thickness for twilight chirruped it.

"Doris Diberto, Doris Diberto!"

Surely, never before had the little blind boy shot so fast and so straight.

"Doris Diberto," repeated Matthew Ferguson to himself, with the air of a man who has made a tremendous discovery. "Why, that is the woman I am going to marry."

An unaccountable nervousness swept over him. The first number was a vaudeville sketch, of which Matthew heard not a syllable. The second number fell to her whose name had stirred him so profoundly, and, as she stepped forward, a waving line of black passed before Matthew's eyes. His vision cleared and he looked curiously at the young woman who was bowing graciously to acknowledge the applause about her.

He meant, of course, to examine her coldly, critically, impartially, as if no veil of enchantment had been cast upon him by her very name. But one glimpse at her sufficed to assure him how futile must be such an attempt.

Tall, slim, with a figure well rounded in spite of the long, graceful lines of the torso that made of every movement and poise a thing of sheer joy, she was a woman who seemed by some trick of nature to exude the essence both of youth and maturity, and Matthew Ferguson, so quick at drawing deductions, so skilled in classifying and analyzing human traits, was not blinded to the

degree of being entirely forsaken by his critical faculty. Her paramount charm consisted in the dual nature of her personality. Young she was, as spring and dawn are young and beautiful, and lovely she was in precisely the same way, but there was about her nothing of the plaintiveness and pathos of spring and dawn. An intense, keen joyousness seemed to exude from her, to beam from her smile, to speak from her eye.

His thoughts harked to Alison Beecham as a foil. Alison, attractive only because of her ultra-modishness, would have been ridiculous if accoutered in the vestments of a by-gone age, always unbeautiful to the modern eye because of modern subservience to current and swiftly changing fashions. Doris Diberto, he knew, accoutered howsoever, would always be beautiful. Clad as a Roman vestal, a Turkish harem lady, as an Italian of the Renaissance, as a *grande dame* of the French salons, in Directoire costume or in the hideous style in which the Empress Eugénie masked her temporary loss of figure, she would still be beautiful because her beauty was so exquisite that it lost nothing by having applied to it the criterion of an absolute standard.

The sun, striking her slantingly, illuminated her in much the same way as a calcium light at the opera lights up the figure of a Wagnerian goddess. It sharply limned the outlines of swelling bosom and curving hips. It struck golden glints from cheek and rounded arm, telling Matthew Ferguson that the delicate hairs of face and hands were as golden as the heavy halo of hair; and even at that distance he could see that her eyes were of mottled gold rather than of brown.

She began to sing. Matthew Ferguson was like the man who knew but two tunes—"Hail Columbia" and "not Hail Columbia." He had endured one or two operas because he had been led thither by some man or other who

might be useful to him. And he had not accounted the time wholly wasted because, while the musical bedlam was in progress, he had been able to work out comfortably one or two legal problems which happened to engross him at the time. Now, for the first time, he knew what it meant to thrill to the sound of a human voice. The limpid, crystal tones searched him through and through. Body and soul of him they seemed to claim as pasture for the quest in which they were engaged.

Cousin Amanda whispered to him.

"They say her voice is good enough for grand opera, if she chose to go on the stage."

Mr. Ferguson frowned at Amanda. He had never frowned before when spoken to during a song.

She had ceased singing, was wildly applauded, gave an encore, and then, bowing and laughing, retired gracefully from the impromptu stage. Watching her, Matthew saw to his surprise, that, on leaving the tiny stairs which led downward, instead of returning to the box where the "family" sat, she threaded her way through a narrow path dividing an enormous growth of blooming boxwood. He caught sight of the filmy white dress fluttering from between the shrubs, where, near the earth, the branches had lost their growth of leaves. He frowned with displeasure at her disappearance. He had meant to study her at his leisure as she sat in the "family box."

"Don't you care for vaudeville?" inquired Amanda. "You seem frightfully bored."

He replied, with extraordinary presence of mind:

"I am a bit bored. The wonderful gardens seem so much more alluring than any trumpery entertainment."

"After the entertainment you can wander about at your pleasure."

"After the entertainment it will be dark," he sniffed, contemptuously.

The actors were already on the stage. Amanda lowered her voice to an irritating, rasping whisper.

"If you want to go off now by yourself, run along. I shan't be offended. Be back by eight o'clock, please, to take me home. Someone else will give me refreshments."

"It seems churlish to leave you," he mumbled, his heart beating with high joy in his bosom.

"Nonsense. Go quickly, before they start."

Softly voicing his apologies, he crawled toward the aisle, stumbled into the open, and made his way in the direction of the box hedge. Had Amanda read what was in his mind? He corrected his opinion of her again, as so often before. Amanda was a good sort. She had, without a doubt, suspected what had happened to him, and was determined to be no marplot.

He gained the box hedge path, entered it, and, walking as rapidly as he dared, followed its winding path. The growth of the shrubs was so thick that for many yards it obscured the landscape that lay beyond, and Matthew tasted the pleasant savor of being bent upon a quest which would end he knew not where. Of one thing only was he certain, and that was the only thing that mattered. Doris Diberto was somewhere in front of him, for he had passed no opening in the hedge large enough to admit the passage of a woman wearing a filmy lace dress.

Suddenly, on turning at a bend, he saw the white dress fluttering before him. The path was now sloping downward and he could see that both path and hedge terminated a few yards beyond. The figure in white stood still, and Matthew also came to a dead halt. What if she were to turn back? But a moment later he realized that

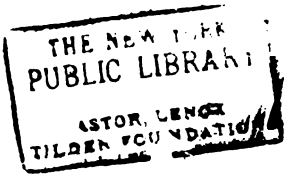
there was no fear of that, realized also her reason for coming at this hour. Preliminary to setting the sun was weaving a golden halo for the sky, and the end of the path, with dome-shaped pillars of box at either side, framed in the sky as if it were a picture.

The woman, now at the end of the path, laid one hand upon the pillar of box and stood watching the sunset. Mr. Ferguson, standing some seven yards behind her, watched also as the enormous disc of flaming copper-colored gold touched the horizon, sank into it, became transformed into a bowl, lessened gradually in size, and finally disappeared. The afterglow continued, pouring molten sulphur edged with turquoise-blue and shell-pink over clouds and sky.

Doris Diberto moved at last. She stepped out into the open and Matthew Ferguson followed her cautiously. She walked downward quickly, disappearing from view, and the man, hurrying after her, saw that she had descended by a small flight of stairs into an Italian garden of a size and beauty which he had never seen equaled. An enormous basin of water was there, covered with pink and blue pond lilies, and in the center of this basin was an enormous statue of sea-horses, which he surmised was a work of Macmonnies. Instead of the ilex hedges of Italy there were box, barberry and clipped cypress. Marble statuary, representing fauns, satyrs, and nymphs, was scattered about, and the marble benches, supported by dragons and centaurs, were piled with red velvet cushions, which, in that atmosphere of unreality, gleamed mysteriously from the Parian marble upon which they lay.

Advancing cautiously, he saw Doris Diberto seat herself upon one of these benches. Leaning upon the coping of the balustraded terrace which commanded a view

"OH, MY LOVE, MY LOVE," HE HEARD HER SAY. "MY DEAR, DEAR LOVE, WHEN ARE YOU COMING TO ME?" p. 85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of the garden below, and secure in the shelter of a cypress tree, he watched her fascinatedly.

The afterglow was losing its brilliance. The sky was now a monochrome of pallid red, and the shadows lying in the embrace of shrubs and trees thickened visibly.

Suddenly he saw her rise and stretch out her hands.

"Oh, my love, my love," he heard her say. "My dear, dear love, when are you coming to me?"

Matthew Ferguson had the sensation of turning deathly pale. She, too, then, realized that somewhere in the Universe was a mate waiting for her, chosen from among all other men as her fit complement in Nature's universal scheme. He suppressed a mad impulse to leap over the narrow balustrade. His sound common-sense held in leash the romantic trend of his nature, which, until this hour, had never been in the ascendant.

He turned resolutely and walked away, protesting earnestly to himself that convention must be satisfied, that, like a civilized being, he must get Amanda to present him to Doris Diberto so that he might that very evening begin his wooing.

He reëntered the boxwood path and turned for a last glimpse of her. She had risen and stood near the edge of the marble basin. The moon was rising back of her, interweaving its golden woof with the silver of the water, and bathing it in pale splendor.

A whippoorwill was singing its evening song for the delectation of its mate. A catbird, somewhere near his feet, was chattering angrily at some marauding chipmunk or mole. High above him the quaint triple call of the oven-bird sounded cool and clear, a little louder, a little shriller with each repetition, "Teacher, *teacher,* TEACHER!"

All nature was bent on courtship and wooing, for it was spring. He, too, would begin his courtship—the

slow, laborious human courtship which civilization prescribed—that very evening. Before he slept he would look into her eyes, touch her hand, palm grazing palm, and perhaps see in her eyes some flickering look of recognition that she divined him to be her mate, even as he had known her as his from among a thousand women. Again the call of the oven-bird was heard: "Teacher, *teacher,* TEACHER!"

He saw her turn, walk slowly in his direction, and, realizing the disadvantage of being seen there, he turned also, and briskly made his way through the dark path, crunching in his haste upon the fragile shell of a snail, grounding his heel upon a luckless toad, breaking carelessly through the roof of a mole's house.

The lanterns on the great lawn had been lighted, and Mr. Ferguson, filled with sudden love of his kind, found the scene of love making, never absent from any entertainment, not unpleasant. He watched for Doris to reappear, saw her join a tall, soldierly looking man of sixty or thereabouts, who took charge of her with a paternal manner. He heard them exchange a few sentences, heard the man condole with her upon her mother's continued poor health. Her answer left him agasp, palpitating, touched to the quick.

"I knew it, I knew it," he said, jubilantly, "she is as good as she is beautiful."

He was in a state of exultation that bordered on frenzy. His pulses were hammering, his heart pounding, his head in a whirl. He was wild to begin his courtship, furious with Amanda because he was unable to find her. He felt as an irretrievable loss every moment that elapsed until he was introduced to Doris. Never had time seemed so precious, never had the moments seemed such a chalice of happiness. Finally he came upon

Amanda, sipping lemonade and eating a dainty, crustless sandwich.

"Amanda," he said peremptorily, "you must introduce me to the Diberto ladies—to Doris Diberto; will you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Now," he insisted.

"Now? Do let me finish my lemonade? Why such haste?" Amanda laughed, and Matthew thought he detected in her laughter that shade of amusement experienced by all humans when they see one of their kind smitten by the invisible arrow.

"Do hurry," he said brusquely. What mattered it, though all the world knew that he was in love? The divine fury of joy that was leaping in his veins was not a thing of which to be ashamed.

"Do hurry," he repeated more insistently.

Obligingly Amanda gulped down the last of her lemonade, disposed of the glass by placing it on the ground near some shrubs, and rose to join him.

"Why are you in such haste, Matthew?" she asked again, maliciously, he thought. He replied, answering asininity with asininity:

"Because she is blind and lame and ugly."

Amanda's laugh seemed a trifle forced. He wondered that she did not badger him, as, under the circumstances, with sweet humanity, she should have done, since he had made the situation clear to her. What of it? He would woo in the manner in which he had fashioned his career —in hot haste, speedily, showing thrift in the matter of time.

They were approaching the Diberto group. Amanda's voice sounded constrained as she said:

"Doris does not seem to be there. I will introduce you to her mother, and then Mrs. Parsons can later introduce you to Doris."

"Mrs. Parsons? Her mother is married again?"

"Oh, no," Amanda's voice was more forced than before. Doris's maiden name was Parsons. You understand, don't you, that she is Lawrence Diberto's wife?"

Amanda kept her eyes sedulously away from his face as she spoke, and Mr. Ferguson, for one brief moment, experienced such a sensation of giddiness that he was stunned. The shock was so intense, so sudden, that he felt no emotion whatever beyond that of having received a terrific impact. He contrived to regain his composure quickly.

"Never mind introducing me to Mrs. Parsons," he managed somehow to utter the words in a matter-of-fact voice.

To have to talk inanities at such a moment would have been impossible. But this lady had already espied them, and was calling to Amanda in a very shrill voice to "come over here," and, in the due course of events, Matthew Ferguson was introduced.

He found his fear of having to talk trivialities unfounded. The lady herself abundantly attended to that part of the conversational game. She was a small, stout woman, with a sallow complexion and a fondness for monologues, the tenor of which she adapted to her own frame of mind, not to her hearer's knowledge of herself or her affairs.

"Doris disappeared immediately after singing," she said. "She does beat anything, that girl does. When I was young it was hardly considered good form for a woman to show that she was in love with her husband. I always found it wiser to let my husband show that he was in love with me—at least in public. But there is that girl of mine, so crazily in love with her Lawrence that, when he is away, she just sits and moons by the hour. Well, I was young myself once, and I assure you

the fact that I was married did not keep me from making the most of every good-looking man's company who happened to be around when my husband was away. But there is no accounting for taste. Of course, Lawrence is worth a woman's making so much of him, still, I could never forget that there are other fish in the ocean."

On and on she rattled. Matthew made his escape as soon as he could, and he waited for Amanda on the outskirts of the lawn.

He was grateful to her for pretending to sleepiness on the way home. He was grateful to her for abstaining from all comment and all questions. They found that Andrew had retired, and, declining the sandwiches and the glass of wine Amanda offered him, he went to his room immediately.

But sleep was not for him that night. He had looked forward with longing to a quiet night in the country, but to-night the multitudinous voices of the country and the moonlight added to his misery. He heard the clock strike one, two, and three, and then, springing out of bed, he began pacing the floor, oblivious of the fact that, in the dead stillness of the rural night, the sound of pacing feet must be heard all through the house. His entire efforts were bent in the direction away from thought and feeling. With all the iron-clad hardihood of will which was his, he meant to break the enchantment which had fallen upon him as quickly as it had fallen. He meant to emerge from his room the next morning with the spell broken, heart and fancy free once more.

There came a gentle rap at the door.

"It is I, Matthew," said Andrew's voice.

Matthew admitted him, and Andrew inquired, looking at his cousin with anxious intentness:

"What is the matter?"

"The matter?" It did not occur to Matthew to deny

that anything was amiss. "I have made an egregious ass of myself, that's what's the matter."

"Hm," said Andrew, seating himself on the bed, as if preparing to receive a lengthy confidence.

"Do you remember," Matthew questioned explosively, "what I told you the first time we met about marrying—about knowing the right woman the first time I saw her? Well, I have seen her—or, at least, I thought she was the right woman when I saw her."

"And what makes you think——"

Matthew interrupted his cousin wildly.

"She's married, *married!*" There was a note of hysteria in his voice. He began drumming his knuckles against the window-pane.

"Look here, Andrew," he said, "why don't you say what you think? You think me fifty-seven different kinds of imbecile, I suppose, don't you? A grown, sensible, adult man believing for years that there was such a thing as love at first sight, and cherishing that belief as if it were priceless gold of his soul. I'm a fool, I tell you, a regular fourteen-karat, thorough-going, quadruple-plated fool."

He sat down in a chair and, pretending to a coolness which he was far from feeling, continued to speak rapidly.

"My opinion is, if you ask me, that love is a figment of the imagination. We have heard so much about it and read so much about it, that, subconsciously, we begin to think that the big thing in life is love. In reality it is nothing, just a fiction that is kept alive to give novelists and dramatists a nail on which to hang their fabrications. There is no such thing as love, properly speaking. There is liking, affection, passion. But love, it simply does not exist, and the man who thinks it does is a self-deluded fool, such as I was until this night's revelation."

"Um," said Andrew.

"Henceforth my intellect reigns supreme. I bar emotion in the matter of marriage as I have barred it from the rest of my life. I shall marry, of course, but my marriage will be made on the same principle on which I conduct my business affairs. Henceforth I snap my fingers at love."

"Um," said Andrew again.

"You do not believe me?"

But Andrew seemed incapable of uttering any sound but the enigmatic "Um" with which he had interlarded Matthew's narrative throughout.

Matthew arose, unable, because of the restlessness that obsessed him, to endure inaction. He moved about aimlessly. Once, when he took up a little vase that stood on the bookcase, he was annoyed to see that his fingers trembled perceptibly. He wondered why Andrew said nothing. Even Andrew's everlasting "Um" would have been preferable to this stony silence.

"I mean all I say. I disclaim love. I deny it exists," he shot out.

Andrew spoke at last.

"And what will you do without your motive-power? How are you going to eliminate love from your schedule of life? What, I say, are you working for, if not for a wife, and a home, and, perhaps, children?"

Mr. Ferguson turned a haggard face to his cousin.

"Don't," he said piteously. "Don't."

"For heaven's sake, Matthew," said Andrew, "don't repress yourself as you are doing. Come, speak out, unburden yourself to me. Self-control is all very well, but self-repression, if carried too far, is bound to play the very devil with a man's nervous system. Come, speak out."

Mr. Ferguson regarded his cousin with quivering lips.

He had a horrid suspicion that, if Andrew insisted on continuing in this strain, he, Matthew Ferguson, the self-controlled, the god-like, maker of his own career, master of fate, would break down like an hysterical school-girl and cry.

Andrew, suddenly merciless, continued.

"You had high ideals, and you lived up to them. Although you are a man of exceptionally strong passions, unless I am much mistaken, you lived a clean life and a life of self-repression, and, because you craved a psychic outlet for the feeling which, through long years of ascending maturity and chastity was gaining a terrific strength, you wisely placed the experience of love which you knew would some day come to you, as it comes to all men and women, at the very summit and pinnacle of life. You made it the goal toward which you were working, the laurel which would be yours as reward for hard work, and you were right in so doing. You have gone through a cruel experience, and you cannot shake it off as if it were a bit of dust that flecked your garments, and say 'this thing does not exist.' The better and wiser and manlier way is to say, 'Yes, this thing does exist, but I am a man and therefore can fight it and face it and rise above it.'"

Mr. Ferguson's splendid self-control gave way, and the horrid thing which he had feared would happen actually happened. Tears were in his eyes and he was shaking from head to foot.

"But I cannot fight it, Andrew, and that is the truth. I—I am bowled over, that's all."

"That is how you feel at the moment."

"That is how I will feel always."

"No, my boy, not always, time alleviates."

"Oh, yes, when I'm seventy perhaps; when toothless and bald, and blind, and lame, then, indeed, I may over-

come this fool madness that is burning in me. Andrew; oh, Andrew!"

"Yes, my boy."

"I have lived a clean life—I have kept my mind and my imagination clean as well—but I can tell you that the thought that she is another man's wife is torment fit for devils."

Andrew nodded his head commiseratingly.

"I have fought against the thoughts that crowd around me—they come like pictures—like flashlights—always and always I see her face and a man's face in the background—and her lips are eager for his and his for hers——"

"Yes, my boy," Andrew spoke soothingly.

"Another man's wife!"

"You must try to realize that, Matthew."

"If I do it will drive me mad."

"We do not go mad so easily."

"I have never spoken to her, I have never touched her hand, and yet I feel as if I had known her always—as if she were part of my life—Oh, it's the height of folly—in the hours in which I have lain awake since coming home I have had conversations with her——"

"Yes, yes."

"Such conversations—and I have kissed her—kissed her."

"Phantom kisses, Matthew."

"To me real kisses, so real that, if I were to meet her to-morrow, I would expect—God only knows what."

"It's a fiery furnace, Matthew, but all men must pass through it."

"That this should happen to me, just this way, to me, who demanded for my true love a woman whose imagination as well as her person was an unwritten sheet—and

she's writ upon—there's not a blank leaf left for me—even if she were free—and yet I love her——"

"There are other women in the world."

"What do they profit me? Hundreds of women have I met and passed by. Not to a single one did I give a fleeting thought. For not one did I care. And this one who—for all I have cared for women so far—might be the first woman I met in all my life—this woman is married!"

"Yes, my boy—she is married."

"Oh, I am cheated, tricked. Her mother, have you met her mother?"

"Yes, Matthew."

"A vulgarian! And the woman I meant to love, my ideal woman, queen of my dreams, inchoate but real, was to be well born and an unwritten sheet."

He beat his hands together nervously.

"And the more I struggle, Andrew, the worse it is. Serpents are about my brain, they are licking at it with tongues of fire, and wasps are stinging my heart, and my eyes feel like holes, save that I can see with them."

"There are other women in the world, I say again."

"But only this one for me; the first woman to impress herself upon my heart, the first woman to speak to the manhood in me, the first woman to call to my soul, the first woman with whom to be in the most forsaken corner of the earth would be happiness and bliss, the first woman to make me feel the witchery and the allure of sex. And she is another man's wife! And, though that man disappeared, or died, or divorced her, or she him, never could his image be wholly obliterated from her heart; never could the past be undone; never could the kisses he gave her and she received be wiped away. Andrew, Andrew, I am mad, stark, raving mad. And, so help me God, I love her."

"My poor lad."

Mr. Ferguson caught his breath with a sound like a hiss.

"You have met them both, Andrew. What sort of man is he? And she—Oh, you know what I want to know."

"What shall I say?" asked Andrew. "For the first time in my life I wish I could speak ill of someone I know. I would to heaven I might tell you that she is a shrew, a coquette, a spendthrift. I wish I could tell you that she is purseproud, a snob and selfish. I would rejoice to be able to tell you that she is worthless, unkind, given to folly."

"If you told me all that I would tell you that you lied. Tell me about the husband."

Andrew frowned. He spoke slowly.

"Charming fellow, an admirable host, a cultured gentleman."

"And as a husband? Come, Andrew, what sort of a husband is he, so far as you can see?"

Andrew was at his favorite avocation of matching the fingers of his red, bony hands.

"I have never seen a more devoted, lover-like couple," he replied gravely.

Matthew Ferguson leaned back in his chair.

"I am tired of thinking of her," he said. "I am weary of seeing her face before my eyes. I am weary of hearing the crickets chirp her name. I am weary of it all."

Andrew looked at him sharply.

"Look you, Cousin Matthew," he said, "I will tell you a thing it would take you years to find out for yourself. Love is not always at top-notch. It is subject to ebb and tide. When a man is happily married, that ebb and tide come normally and naturally. With you, it will be otherwise. At high-tide you will suffer—I need not tell you

how or what—at ebb-tide there will come intervals of numbness. It remains for you to make the most of ebb-tide. Do not, like some hypocrites, when the fire burns low, protest vehemently to yourself that the flame flares higher than ever, that no man ever suffered as exquisitely as yourself, that you are proud of it and would not have it otherwise."

"Heaven knows," groaned poor Matthew, "I would be only too happy to be free of this net in which unwarily I am enmeshed. And yet——"

"Ah, there you are—and yet! And yet! That is the attitude I caution you to guard against. At ebb-tide, I repeat, like the wise man you are, go and dig your clams."

"Go and dig my clams?" asked Matthew Ferguson, stupidly.

"Yes, go and pay your addresses elsewhere. You cannot do it while the fever burns high, therefore I counsel you to do it when the fever burns low. For the dozenth time, there are other women in the world. Cultivate one or a dozen of them, as you choose. And one day you will awaken to the fact that your first love's ebb-tide has become perpetual, and that a different face rides upon the crest of the breakers when the tide is high."

"Never, never," declared Matthew vehemently. "I know myself better than you do. I never change, not even in little things. Oh, it is unthinkable that the face of Doris Diberto should ever recede or fade before the face of another woman." He laughed. There came upon him something of his old buoyancy and boyishness. "You do not know how it feels to love as I love her, if you think, really think and believe, that I can ever forget her."

Andrew looked very grave.

"Then make a sober second choice. It is not given to

many men and women to marry their first love. Yet is there much happiness in the world."

Matthew Ferguson shook his head. He stood at the open casement, looking toward the east, where dawn was breaking. The homely face looked beautiful with spiritual rapture.

"You may mock me as the prince of idealists. But rather will I endure the loneliness of celibacy all my life than take any other woman to wife. Doris, Doris Diberto!" he cried, "not even the name that charmed me the moment I heard it is wholly your own. Part of it is your husband's. Doris, Doris Diberto, I love you, you, you only. Rather will I lead the uncompanioned, cheerless, driftwood existence of an old bachelor, with an incessant longing for a wife and children and a hearth of my own, so you were the wife and the children were yours, than see another woman in the place which you alone could truly fill. Doris, Doris Diberto, it does not harm you or yours if I take your image to my heart and keep it there forever and a day. It does not harm you if I speak your name familiarly as if you were my very own. Doris, Doris Diberto, married or unmarried, matron or maid, I must love you always alone among women."

Andrew touched him gently on the shoulder.

"Dawn is here," he said, "and you have not slept. Will you not try to get some sleep now?"

Mr. Ferguson shook his head in negation.

"I feel a great longing," he said, "for simple, tender and reverential things." He went to the bookcase and took down a battered, well-thumbed Bible. Opening it, he seated himself at the open window through which dawn was stealthily creeping and began to read in a soft gentle voice:

"Behold my love, thou art fair, thou art beautiful——"

## CHAPTER VI

*Matthew Ferguson Has a Lucky Escape from Self-entanglement, and Once More Proves Himself Fortune's Favorite*

Many matters were awaiting Mr. Ferguson's return to New York. On Wednesday morning he received the check for his June salary as corporation counsel, as promised by Mr. Cravatt, and on Thursday he began his quest for the men who had been shanghaied by the Alpha Line. By the end of the month he had together twenty-four indubitable cases, and he worked ceaselessly all through the August dog-days on the great case which, even more than the others which had preceded it, was to establish firmly his reputation. By the beginning of September he had the case prepared. It was due on the calendar for the first week in October.

Sometimes, so engrossed was he with the work, he forgot that he was laboring in the cause of Scientific Egoism. But never did he forget Doris Diberto. He quelled the strange insurrection in his blood during the day, throwing his entire Herculean energy into the task in hand, but at night his imagination ran riot, and to escape from the fancies that obsessed him he extended his day far beyond midnight.

He had joined several clubs, but the diversions which they offered afforded him no satisfaction whatever. Everybody he knew was away during the hot weather,

except Grace Cravatt, who insisted on remaining in town to keep her father company in the large, gloomy house on Riverside Drive, for Adam Cravatt was firmly anchored in the city that summer by a number of imperative matters. Mrs. van Duyskuk, on telling Matthew of Grace's decision, with great archness and playfulness hinted that her refusal to leave the city might be due to an emotion other than filial devotion, and Mr. Ferguson, seeing the color come and go in the girl's cheeks whenever she greeted him or bade him adieu, or even when he addressed her unexpectedly, realized how serious was her infatuation for him.

"Dang it," he said to himself. "If I were her brother, I would brain any man who had the poor taste not to return her love."

That very evening, drawing up a chair in front of his mirror, he addressed the somewhat wan and haggard image that returned his interested stare:

"Look here, my boy, you must make some change in your manner of living. You have been sleeping about four hours, on an average, during the past months, and the weather is hot and you are working fairly hard, and you can rest assured that you will look about fifty in two years if you continue in this way. It's the pace that kills. You must face this thing, as Andrew said, and not run away from it. If you wish to remain true to the image of Doris Diberto, you are at perfect liberty to do so, but there is no earthly use in trying to escape all thought of her by playing billiards and cards until the small hours of the morning, when you do not care a pin's head about either.

"You may be chivalrous, if you wish, and render her who does not even know of your existence the tribute of not marrying because of your love for her, but you must act like a rational being, and not like a creature who

burns the candle at both ends in a vain effort to forget some evil thing in his past.

"Another thing, my boy. Once or twice lately you have taken a whiskey and soda, not to drown thought, but simply because you were so worn and fagged from lack of sleep that you could not have gone through the day without the stimulant. And, what is infinitely worse, twice or thrice lately you have felt a craving for just this stimulant. Now, this sort of thing will not do. If you have a mind to be a superman in love, remaining true to an image, you are at liberty to do so, but then you must not descend into the limbo where men are depreciated from men into undermen, because they have lost control of their nervous systems."

Having thus lectured himself, he drew back from the mirror, and with folded arms stared moodily at the ceiling.

"Oh, sugar," he said, "the ebb-tide of which Andrew spoke never comes." But he forced himself nevertheless to think of Grace Cravatt.

"She possesses every quality which I demand in my wife," he said under his breath. "She is sweet, good, gentle, of good family; she loves me to distraction, poor child; I would have preferred her poor, but I will not let her money stand in the way. Then, why not?"

He pictured her to himself as enduring the same anguish for him that he was enduring for Doris Diberto. He liked to think that this phase of the affair stimulated his brotherly fondness for her into a feeling more vital and less cold. He tried to make himself believe that his pulses were quickening. So they were, but there had flashed upon him a vision of the golden penumbra that lay upon Doris's skin, and his thoughts were again swirling hither and thither in a whirlpool of passion for her.

"I must end this," he said. "I have got to end it in some way in fairness to Grace."

Yet he was not thinking of Grace in the least when he finally decided that he would make her an offer of marriage. He was thinking only of himself, and hoping that, once his word was pledged to Grace, the image of Doris, which he had no power to exorcise by other means, would fade of its own accord.

His restlessness during the next day was appalling. He found it impossible to concentrate on his work, and, at three o'clock in the afternoon, he apprised his secretary that he was going home. He bathed, dressed himself in fresh linen and his most dapper suit of tan Panama cloth, and, ringing for a taxi, drove up to Riverside Drive.

Grace was home and alone, and, for fear that his resolution to put an end to the matter would ooze away, he decided to commit himself at once.

"I have come to have a very personal talk with you," he said, having greeted her.

She answered him not a word, but sat looking at him in mute ecstasy. Her small hands were folded in her lap, and from her dove-gray eyes shone the look of intense and complete love which speaks as eloquently as words, as insistently as music, as intimately as a kiss. Comprehension of that look in a woman's eyes comes to every man by intuition, and Matthew, seeing it in Grace Cravatt's eyes, entirely unclouded and unmasked, doubtless because of his promising opening remark, felt himself a vandal about to stumble ruthlessly into a holy of holies.

He felt himself abashed, humbled, before the adoration which those pleading gray eyes held out to him. With lightning distinctness he realized the enormity of the offense which he had been about to commit. To take that girl in his arms and kiss her, with such a maddening

longing lurking behind his lips for the lips of another woman was an outrage. It was an outrage to both women, and there flashed upon him the trite old truth that no man can offer any woman an outrage without outraging the womanhood of the woman he loves.

Poor little Grace Cravatt was smiling at him helpfully and kindly.

"You are not looking very well," she said. He realized, with a pang of remorse, that she was trying to "make it easy for him." One thing loomed clearly before him. He had wanted to put an end to things for his own sake. Now, out of humanity, he must put an end to things for Grace's sake, albeit the ending was destined to be very different from the one he had set out to compass.

"I am not feeling very well. I have been somewhat foolish."

Grace indulged in her favorite expletive, "Oh!" and relapsed into silence.

He looked away. He could not bear to see the look of ineffable tenderness with which she was regarding him, which it was his duty, as a manly man, to wipe away.

"I have been very foolish," he repeated. He swallowed hard. "Last June, on Midsummer Eve, I had a curious experience, and I have deliberately overworked myself trying to forget the—experience."

"That was foolish, indeed."

There was a little quaver in her voice. He glanced quickly at her and saw that he had already succeeded in diminishing the happiness in her face.

"You will think me very silly, perhaps," he continued, "when I tell you of my experience. May I presume on our friendship to speak to you of a very—personal matter?"

Her answer was almost inaudible, and he knew she was now fully prepared to have him dig deep down into her

gentle little heart with the dagger which was to kill her hopes.

"I visited my cousin, Doctor Hart, at St. Agnes-on-the Falls, and at an entertainment given in a beautiful old country estate, in walking through a wood path, I came upon a woman in the moonlight. She was very beautiful."

He moistened his lips. Decidedly, the task was not pleasant.

"It sounds very silly, but without speaking to this woman, without being introduced to her, I fell madly in love with her. Later, I learned that she was married."

"And then——?"

"I tried to quell the pain and the longing. I tried to make myself believe that to love a woman with whom I had not as much as exchanged a greeting was sheer idiocy. But——"

"But?" she questioned shyly.

"I cannot conquer the feeling, and I find I do not even want to conquer it. I am content to live on with her image in my heart. Do you think me very foolish?"

He had risen and, with his elbow on the mantel, stood looking down upon her. He turned to her now, in expectation of her answer, and, as he had foreseen, all the glory which joy had painted in her face was gone. But there was a look of sublime quiescence in it, which was very beautiful.

"Foolish? I think it beautiful." She spoke quickly, but there were lapses between each of her sentences and phrases that told of the difficulty she encountered in casting her thoughts in intelligible language.

"I thank you for honoring me with your confidence, Mr. Ferguson." Again the odd little break. "You are acting just as I would have expected you to act"—another pause—"in every respect. I do not suppose any

other man that ever lived would be content to do such a thing—but—there is at least one—woman—who will be content——" the breaks were coming thick and fast—"to live on with only the image of the man whom—whom—to bear her company"—she smiled wanly. A sort of exultation shone from her eyes, and they were so bright that he suspected them of being moist. She stretched out both her hands to him, and he took them in silence.

"I thought," he said, "that you would like to know."

Her eyes closed, and he saw that she was crying softly.

Tenderly, reverentially, almost worshipfully he lifted her hands to his lips and kissed first the one and then the other. Then, without speaking again, he left her.

He realized that he must have tramped miles before he reached home. He was living now in a bachelor's apartment hotel on upper Broadway and the bell-boy, on seeing him, came forward and handed him a special delivery letter. It was addressed in Amanda's handwriting, and, wondering what matter of prime haste Amanda could have to communicate to him, he tore open the envelope and pulled out its contents.

A newspaper clipping fluttered to the floor and was rescued by the obsequious hall-boy: Matthew took it from him, while reading the brief note which Amanda had enclosed, which merely stated that the enclosed clipping from the local paper would be of interest.

The intelligence which Amanda had hurried to him by special delivery letter was couched by the local reporter in these words:

"LAWRENCE DIBERTO THROWN BY HORSE AND KILLED INSTANTLY. YOUNG WIFE PROSTRATED WITH GRIEF.
BRIDE OF SIX MONTHS, SHE IS NOW A WIDOW.

On the very spot of the road which old Pietro Diberto had shut off as being too uncanny for human nerves, Lawrence Diberto, the last of the venerable family that made St. Agnes-on-the-Falls what it is, was killed this morning at ten o'clock."

Matthew Ferguson read no more. It was a hot night, and he was standing in the glare of a hundred lights in the lobby of a Broadway hotel, but at that moment chill after chill traversed his spine. There came back to him a recollection of the profound conviction which had been born in him that day in June, on the identical spot where Lawrence Diberto had been killed, that a tragedy, to be enacted there, would impinge on his own life.

The tragedy had been another man's, and it was impinging on his life to work for his ultimate good.

Fascinatedly, he watched the gooseflesh quivering on his arm. Then he laughed. It was indecent, it was brutal, it was inhuman, but he laughed, and wave after wave of jubilation flooded him.

Doris was free!

He walked out of the lobby, and began pacing the sidewalk. Doris was free! He was wild with joy, and he could barely restrain himself from giving to it violent expression of some sort. Doris was free! How wise he had been not to propose to Grace Cravatt, after

all! It was a stupendous piece of luck, but Matthew was a man, and could now warm his heart with the reflection that prescience and masculine cleverness had saved him from landing himself in an incomparable tangle. He grew hot and cold as, retrospectively, he reviewed the occurrences of the afternoon, and pictured to himself the distress which would have been his portion if he had actually carried out his determination to offer himself to Grace Cravatt.

It was a nightmare which acted as a sort of speed accelerator to his legs. He found himself scurrying to and fro on the sidewalk like a trapped mouse. He laughed long and joyously and loud. Then, composing himself, he observed aloud:

"This is wicked, this is bad. I am happy because a fellow-being is dead."

But for the life of him he could not feel sorry. He could not even feel sorry for Doris, who, undoubtedly, was weeping her pretty eyes out at the bier of her husband. He hated himself for the mood he was in. He struggled to overcome it, by repeating to himself, "I am sorry; of course I am sorry"; he tried to fix his thoughts now on Lawrence Diberto, snatched by death away from riches, happiness and a young and lovely bride. But unhappiness was not to be coaxed to visit him at that moment.

Suddenly he sobered down and, oddly enough, it was not thought of Doris that had the sobering effect. He was thinking of Grace Cravatt, and wondering whether honor made it incumbent upon him to tell her that his case was not as hopeless as, in good faith, he had painted it to be not an hour since.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Mr. Ferguson Hears a Good Deal About the Lady Who Represents Fate to Him, and Engages a Secretary*

Mr. Ferguson was not a man to admit defeat in whatever garb it presented itself. He knew that the attitude of the man who admits himself beaten engenders a subtle poison which paralyzes the will. Behind the distressing emotional pain that came to him on learning that Doris was a married woman lay the painful and disconcerting discovery that even the most efficient man cannot wholly shape his own career. To the author and apostle of an Infallible System of Self Conquest, and World Conquest as well, a discovery of this sort was extremely painful. Therefore, not wishing to invite universal disaster, Mr. Ferguson had forced himself to disregard this discovery and, by coercing his thoughts away from it, had jauntily continued on his career.

It was only after poor Lawrence Diberto's death that Mr. Ferguson fully realized how deeply he had been hurt by the treachery of fate. Now, once more, he was able to look upon himself as one of the chosen men whose indomitable energy enables them to get precisely what they ask of life. He even rebuked himself for mistrusting Destiny, which had made so kindly an interposition in his behalf. He winced a little, it is true, when he remembered that the unwrit-upon virgin mind which he had held to be a prime essential in Matthew Fer-

guson's wife did not accrue to Doris Diberto, and that the woman whom he desired to marry bore another man's name, and was hall-marked, therefore, as that man's erstwhile property.

Decidedly, it was not the ideal state of affairs which he had pictured for his wooing, but, since fate had condescended to meet him half-way, he, in turn, would not be churlish by refusing to meet fate at the turnpike. Matthew Ferguson was nothing if not adaptive, and he was a past-master in the art of banishing from his life whatsoever was disagreeable to him. He had thriven well so far on this policy, which was part of the System that already had propelled him into the lap of prosperity, and he meant, with all the strength that was in him, to continue to thrive.

Of course he took credit to himself for his control of Pure Reason in forcing himself to ignore Doris's one disqualification. As with all men in love, however, pure reason had very little voice in shaping thoughts and emotions. He was primitively exuberant with the sense that no visible obstacle lay between himself and the woman he loved, and it never occurred to him that there might be an intangible obstacle, such as a disinclination for re-marriage, or, more formidably, a semi-romantic attachment of some sort destined to flower in the very shadow of death.

Matthew had a thrifty habit of gauging the episodes of his life by the salubrious or deleterious effect they exerted upon his capacity for work. He now found that capacity enormously augmented. He had fully prepared his case, including his address of arraignment, against the Alpha Line; but now, rereading this arraignment in the light of the exquisite happiness which he felt himself justified in anticipating, it seemed stilted, crude and machine-made. He sat down one evening at eight,

and worked until five the next morning, revising, modifying, elaborating, until the manuscript was completely honeycombed with interpolations and corrections, and in dictating the new version to his stenographer the next day, he found it admirable.

When finally he delivered the speech in court to crowded benches, the men and women who had been drawn thither by curiosity to hear the flamboyant young lawyer time and again rose from their seats and applauded wildly, until the Judge was forced to threaten to have the courtroom cleared. That checked the enthusiasm a little, but half an hour later, when Mr. Ferguson concluded his address, every one in the audience rose to his feet, and neither judge nor attendants had power to enforce silence. Even the jury was swept away—whether by Mr. Ferguson's eloquence, or the justice of the cause, or the strange process known as the psychology of the masses, it is hard to say. But there the twelve good men and true stood, to the scandal of the judge, and applauded with the rest, and although they withdrew for consultation, as juries are expected to do, they were hardly out of the room when they filed back again, and the talesman gave the verdict against the Alpha Company. Then there was more applause, and several distinguished jurists came and shook Matthew Ferguson by the hand, and eminent pastors congratulated him upon his humanity, and prominent citizens lauded his civic virtue. All in all he had an ovation which the most pampered prima donna might have envied.

The moral effect, both for himself and for the New York and Europe Steamship Company, was precisely that predicted by Matthew Ferguson. He had every reason to be satisfied.

The next day he took the train to St. Agnes-on-the-

Falls. He had couched his reply to Amanda's communication concerning Lawrence Diberto's death in language as dignified as was possible. But he was no hypocrite, and it was impossible for him, as he sat on the porch with the Harts after supper, to keep a note of jubilation out of his voice when he inquired for Mrs. Diberto.

"Look here, Andrew and Amanda," he said, "you both know what is in my heart, so what is the use of beating about the bush. I do not say that I am glad the poor chap is dead, but nothing can alter the fact that he is dead, and I am not given to wasting gray matter on what-might-have-been. Doris Diberto is a free woman. And I intend to marry her as soon as propriety permits."

Andrew interposed dryly.

"Perhaps you will allow her a voice in the matter."

Matthew rejoined coolly:

"I have told you before that I have unbounded confidence in my ability to win any woman I happen to desire as a wife."

"You are too sure of yourself."

"A man cannot be too sure of himself. I believe any man not a fool can win the woman he loves unless her affections are engaged elsewhere."

"Well, Doris Diberto's affections——" Andrew interrupted himself and concluded gently, "You must remember, Matthew, that she was quite madly in love with her husband."

"Cousin Amanda," said Matthew, "I appeal to you. Without your help I am badly handicapped. Will you, in one or two months, arrange to have us meet in some way?"

Amanda did not reply, and Matthew, on looking up, saw her eyes fixed searchingly on her husband's face.

"That almost looks, Amanda," he said, dryly, "as if you were demanding Andrew's permission before promising me your help."

"That is just what I am doing."

"Oh, come," said Andrew, impatiently, "let us speak of some other matter."

Matthew demanded ironically,

"What, for instance—Andalusian fowl?"

Doctor Hart gave his cousin a quick, searching, curious look, then remarked with an odd intonation:

"I should like exceedingly to discuss Andalusian fowl with you."

"And I should like exceedingly to discuss Doris Diberto with you," rejoined Matthew, with heat.

Amanda interposed.

"Look here, Matthew," she said, "it is too early in the day to talk of arranging a meeting between you. I have called three times, and, although she was at home, I was turned away at the door under pretext that she was indisposed. I cannot possibly go there before another fortnight, and it is doubtful whether she will receive me then."

"Well," said Matthew doggedly, "If you will not help me, I'll hit on some plan of my own for meeting her. Trust me."

"You had better leave it to me," said Amanda, with a patronizing air. "Nobody is going to get ahead of you in seeking her favor, for she receives absolutely no one at present."

"Doesn't that seem odd?"

"Not at all," said Amanda, still maintaining her air of proprietary patronage. "Imagine what the poor girl has been through. Any sensitive nature, under the circumstances, would be driven to desperation by listening to the lamentation of the village cronies in her behalf.

Very wisely, she refuses to see everybody, so that no one can take offense. To me there is an element of sublimity in excluding the outer world so resolutely, and in shutting herself up with the memories of her dead happiness."

"Well, she is not going to succeed in shutting out future happiness for very long," commented Matthew Ferguson brusquely. "Not if I can help it."

"It is a good thing for you that she refuses to see anyone at present," Amanda continued easily, "otherwise, with your headlong impulsiveness, you would spoil all by making love to her prematurely. You must remember, Matthew, that she was married but a brief six months when she saw her husband killed before her very eyes. There had been no time for her to experience the many small disappointments which spell disillusionment concerning marriage in general and husbands in particular, and which, sooner or later, come to every wife."

"Very flattering, I am sure," Andrew put in, with his dry smile.

"I have seen much death-bed grief, but never have I seen love and despair and sorrow to match Doris Diberto's."

Matthew Ferguson arose from the intolerably comfortable chair in which he was sitting, and eased the unrest which Amanda's words unloosed in him by seating himself on the spiked railing. The physical discomfort engendered thereby was soothing to his palpitating senses.

"How did you happen to be with her?" he inquired.

"Andrew sent for me—there was no woman in the house, except the maids. Mrs. Pultney-Greene, formerly Doris's governess, and now her companion, was away visiting relatives, and Doris's mother, Mrs. Parsons, was

at Hot Springs, nursing her rheumatism. The affable creature refused absolutely to return to Diberto Manor when we summoned her, saying that she was so ill that the excitement would surely kill her. She added as a flourish that Doris would then have two deaths to deplore, so that it was infinitely the wiser thing to stay away."

"Abominable," said Mr. Ferguson, with unction. His thoughts harked back to the one thing he had heard Doris say, and he repeated, in a crescendo of mounting anger, "Abominable."

"Andrew and Doctor Jenkins had the body placed on a couch. We did not want Doris to see her husband again that day, but she begged so piteously that we consented. I shall never forget the piercing scream she uttered when she saw him."

"She screamed? Doris Diberto *screamed?*" Matthew inquired incredulously.

"Yes, she screamed. Does that surprise you? No matter how refined and cultivated we are, Cousin Matthew, certain experiences sweep away our culture and refinement and control. There are certain sounds, which, heard a single time, ring in the ears of one who hears them until the end of time. Such is the thud-thud of the policeman's club, summoning a fellow-officer, in the dead of night. And such is the terrible scream of someone who sees dead the person most loved in all the world."

Even the spiked railing became a thing of insufferable ease. Mr. Ferguson arose and paced up and down the porch, looking very white and stern. Presently he stopped at the side of Amanda, who had tactfully interrupted her recital to give her cousin time to compose himself.

"Go on," he said.

"Well, Doris fell down on her knees beside the couch, and called her husband by name, and fondled his hand, and laid her warm face against the chill cheek of the dead man, begging him to speak to her once more, to kiss her once more. It was terrible."

"Don't," cried Matthew Ferguson authoritatively. "Don't!" He was unutterably shocked by Amanda's lack of reticence; by her want of delicacy in describing to him this intimate and sacred scene. The outrage to decorum was as great as if Cousin Amanda, having seen the woman he loved in her bath, were to describe to him intimacies of her person. Also he was inexpressibly revolted by his own feelings, which were not wholly those of outraged modesty. There was in them a strong admixture of jealousy, and Matthew Ferguson's innate love of the decencies of life made him hold jealousy of the dead as contemptible in the last degree.

Amanda, however, showed a morbid delight in continuing her narrative.

"Doris's grief was understandable. Lawrence Diberto was—well, I cannot tell you what for fear of again offending my husband."

"Oh, don't mind me in the least," said the husband.

"Very well, I won't. Lawrence Diberto was the most charming man I have ever met."

"Charming—in what way?"

"Oh, in every way. Charming—it's the one word that suits him. It is hard to crystallize a charm, such as was his, into words. Everything about him was attractive—his manner, person, mode of speech. A lovely——"

Andrew interrupted his wife breezily.

"If Amanda will stop rhapsodizing a moment, I will try to give you an idea of the man in intelligible language. He was the Byronic type of man, dressed in lawn tennis shirts and soft collars and wore huge bows

in place of ties. He sang a little, he painted a little, he played the violin a little. He was an admirable host. In brief, he was an adept in all the minor accomplishments that idle women love to gush about."

"Andrew!" said Amanda reprovingly. Her voice demanded, "Am I an idle woman? Do you accuse me?"

Andrew continued.

"He was, in other words, the drawing-room type of man, who seems particularly designed by nature to be the curled darling of a roomful of silly females."

Again Amanda uttered a reproving, "Andrew!"

But the irrepressible Andrew went on.

"A little ineffectual, perhaps, from a man's point of view, but dear to the feminine heart in much the same way as cut glass, jewelry, pillow shams and fine linen. He was so decorative, such an Apollo, you understand, that his very silence was an earnest of intellectual wealth."

Amanda became angry.

"I think it perfectly shocking of you to speak in such a way of a man who died a hideous death so recently."

"My dear!" Andrew's mildness exasperated Amanda further, as Matthew could see, "I am not aware that I said anything detrimental or disagreeable. I merely desire to impress the fact on Matthew that Doris Diberto's husband was a man who, even from beyond the grave, is bound to exert an incalculable influence on so pliable and plastic a nature as his widow's."

"You wish to discourage me," said Mr. Ferguson. "You will not succeed in doing so." His jaw snapped like a steel spring, giving to his curt statement a ring of finality.

"I am very glad," Andrew continued, maintaining his mildness of manner, "that Amanda brought up this mis-

cellany of facts. You are jealous by temperament, Matthew, and——"

"I am not jealous," Matthew denied the allegation with the heat which we infuse only into refutations of just charges. "I'm not at all jealous."

"You're as jealous as—Othello. You and I will have a little talk about this later on."

"Whatever you wish to say, say now." Matthew was angry.

"Very well. My advice is, Keep away from Lawrence Diberto's widow. If he had not died, you would ultimately have married elsewhere."

"I would not have married elsewhere," retorted Matthew tartly. He could scarcely believe that Andrew could make himself so disagreeable, and he felt like telling his cousin this. But he didn't.

"And I can see nothing but unhappiness, Matthew, to a man of your jealous disposition, in a union with a woman whose first attachment was as romantic and as passionate as was hers."

"I am not jealous," denied Mr. Ferguson indignantly.

"Yes, my dear boy, you are jealous, and your jealousy takes the most formidable form possible. You told me once, long ago, that you desired to marry a woman whose mind, as far as romantic attachments were concerned, was a blank. This wish of yours, psychology teaches us, is evidence of the peculiar complexion and the insidious nature of your jealousy, which not content to reckon with the present, reaches back to corral the past."

"Tommyrot," growled the other.

"You're the type of man who makes a will disinheriting his widow in case of remarriage."

"Faugh!" snorted Mr. Ferguson. He was so thor-

oughly angry that he was explosively tapping the pillars of the porch with his foot.

"The average man is differently constituted, Matthew. You are an exception. The average man——"

"I am not at all interested in the average man," snapped Mr. Ferguson with scant courtesy.

"How do you know whether you are or not?" retorted Andrew benignly. "Wait till I get through. The average man, as I was saying, finds a certain allure in a widow, because—Amanda, my love, you have no objection, I suppose, to a few philosophic reflections?"

"None in the world."

"Because—where was I?—Oh, yes—the allure which a widow exerts upon the average man is precisely the same allure which a reputed Don Juan exerts upon the feminine mind. Such, my dear Matthew, is the case in the instance of ninety-nine men out of a hundred. You, however, are the hundredth man, and for you that absinthe quality which for other men stands for piquancy and charm will turn to wormwood and gall. You have had the temerity to give conscious thought to what you desire in a wife. If you marry Doris Diberto, who does not comply with your primary requirement, you will spend every waking hour in Hades."

"Very well," said Matthew Ferguson grimly, "I would rather be Doris Diberto's husband and spend every waking hour in the nether regions of the afterworld, than not be her husband and languish in the earthly tropics of unrequited passion."

He resumed pacing the porch. At the moment he desired nothing so much as to tell Andrew just what he thought of him. He really marveled at his own self-control.

"I shall say no more about it," said Andrew, very softly.

Matthew interrupted his pedestrianism to glower savagely upon his cousin.

"That will suit me capitally. I assure you, Andrew, I—I know my own business thoroughly." Effrontery, perhaps, but mild compared to what Matthew really desired to say.

Andrew, thick-skinned or good-natured, ignored the thrust.

"We are cousins, my boy," he said, "Let it pass."

At this juncture Amanda rose to receive the mail which the letter-carrier handed to her.

She uttered an exclamation as she looked at one of the letters. Then, hastily, as if to hide some clandestine correspondence, she tucked the large, square envelope under the other letters.

"Only bills and receipts, my dear," she said to Andrew.

Matthew wondered at Andrew's complacency in allowing this palpable fraud to pass, and his wonder grew apace when, a minute later, Amanda, having opened the entire mail, making a conspicuous show of her desire for secrecy, motioned to him behind Andrew's back to follow her into the house. He did so, morally revolted by the entire proceeding. There were moments when he hated Amanda with all her silly airs and affectations. At any rate, he was sorely disappointed in the Harts. He told himself, with conviction, that, if they had not been relatives, he would have walked out then and there and never come back. A moment later, his sense of humor came to the surface. He reflected that that was precisely the beauty of having relatives. One quarreled with them, disagreed with them, abused them to their faces, and then, as if nothing had happened, continued on the same footing that antedated the misunderstanding.

"It's a letter from Doris," said Amanda, excitedly. "She apologizes for not receiving me yesterday. She really was ill in bed with a cold, and she asks me to come to see her next week. I shan't tell Andrew a word about it. Of course I will go for your sake, Matthew."

"Do," said Matthew. Amanda was stroking him the wrong way again, and his fur was all ruffled and awry. "Why, in thunder," he thought, "did women make such a show of secrecy when there was no call for it?"

Amanda seemed to derive the most succulent satisfaction from the fact that she was keeping something from her husband, but, as his affair, at the present moment, was practically at Amanda's mercy, Matthew Ferguson, like the wise man he was, restrained himself from quarreling with her.

Amanda continued her secret tactics in the weeks that followed. All through autumn Matthew ran up every other week to spend a day or two with the Harts. The country was glorious at that season, and he made solitary excursions past Diberto Manor, even venturing into the forbidden Manor Grounds, in the vagrant hope of chancing upon Doris.

He caught no sight of her, however, among gold and russet copper beeches, or waving pampas grass, or under maples, whose solidly packed foliage, beautiful in its piebald greens and browns and yellows, looked like some ancient but well preserved tapestry.

Once only he had a flashing glance of her at a window. Her mourning accentuated the loss of bloom upon her cheek, and she seemed thinner and older; gone was all the glorious radiance that had captured him so completely when he had seen her that memorable night in the crepuscular moonlight.

The gold and russet glory of October withered and faded into the sere and austere monotone of November;

browns. All the earth, at St. Agnes-on-the-Falls was turned into a sepia etching with high lights and low. Here and there the etching was transformed into a canvas in oils by the red of the barberry, the flaming scarlet of the mountain ash, the dull red of the partridge berry, giving the somber landscape that touch of color which painters love to introduce into their paintings to vitalize a large expanse of neutral tints.

All through winter Matthew Ferguson was anchored in New York by a multiplicity of details entailed by his new duties as Assistant Corporation lawyer and by his own growing practice as well, although his connection with the Powers was still a secret. And all the time, although he did his work as conscientiously as ever, he was filled with the divine driving unrest which, from time immemorial, has been the heritage of lovers. He strove to keep his mind occupied and placid, but there are intimate moments in every man's life—the time before retiring, between sleep and waking, or when a man bathes or shaves or puts the cuff buttons into his fresh linen—which cannot be utilized for serious thought. And in these off-moments, he paid royally for his self-control during the day.

Was Amanda a poor agent? Was not some other man insinuating himself into Doris's good graces? Was she, perhaps, hopelessly chained to the memory of the young husband she had lost? These reflections, at times, almost drove him mad.

Alison Beecham returned to New York in November. In the midst of his legal avocations, he found time to have a brown dress suit made. His tailor, to Matthew's amazement, acquiesced in the plan almost immediately, and turned out a very chic and distinguished looking suit.

He felt considerable misgivings when he wore it the

first time, but none of the guests at the Beecham mansion seemed to find his appearance ridiculous or laughable. He felt so savage, and looked so savage because of his timidity, that he prayed to have the evening pass off without any quarrel with his hostess.

Like Lord Byron, Matthew awoke the next morning to find himself famous, or rather, famous sartorially as well as professionally. The morning papers, one and all, gave him a paragraph all to himself, because of his brown suit, and, in the course of the morning, the "Bulletin" sent a man to interview Mr. Ferguson concerning the reason of his sensational departure from convention.

Mr. Ferguson, ever ready to turn chance into a windfall, spun his yarn of plausibility even as he talked.

"For one thing," he said to the very boyish looking reporter, "I do not believe in slavishly following a fashion which is unsuitable."

"Why unsuitable, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Because black is the color of solemnity, since it is the color of mourning, and it is the hue of poverty, since every draggled creature of the street wears it. Why then, should well-to-do men apparel themselves in black for evening wear upon occasions which are festive and happy?"

"Any other reasons, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Many more. Compare men in full dress with women in evening clothes. In a woman's clothes is mirrored its wearer's individuality. The men are machine-made and hopelessly alike, save that to some full dress is becoming and to others unbecoming. And, becoming or not, a man must wear regulation evening dress, or has had to, until now."

"I should not think black unbecoming to you, Mr. Ferguson."

"It is not becoming, Mr.——" Mr. Ferguson consulted

the card on his desk, "Mr. Burbridge. Black is becoming to very few men. I am not a good-looking man, but by dint of careful grooming, faultless linen and a conscientious tailor, who has made a study of my peculiar style of ugliness, I am enabled to present an attractive appearance."

"You're too modest, Mr. Ferguson," said young Burbridge, flushing at his own boldness. "If you don't mind my saying so, sir, I fancy you're the type of man that appeals to women; appeals to them so strongly, you know, that they never stop to ask themselves whether or not you are good-looking."

"Purely due to my immaculate clothes," said Mr. Ferguson, acknowledging the compliment with his bewitching smile.

"You do not think then that a little vanity is out of place in a man?" asked the youngster.

"Vanity?" Mr. Ferguson simulated indignant surprise. "Vanity, Mr. Burbridge? Is it possible that you misunderstand my motives in this matter? Why, sir, look at the men you meet in the street. Nine out of every ten men over thirty are so carelessly dressed, and consequently so ill-looking, that you wonder how their wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts can tolerate their presence. I take it, sir," Mr. Ferguson waved his hand with his lordliest air, "that personal vanity has nothing to do with the matter. A man owes it to the women with whom he associates to make his exterior as agreeable as possible. That's all there is to it. It's what we owe the ladies, Mr. Burbridge, and for this reason, finally, I advocate a reform in the evening dress of men. Think how much more pleasant for a woman to see the man she dances with accoutred like herself in evening shades, —pale blue, or salmon, pearl-gray or old rose, than in the lugubrious, unbeautiful black of the present day.

Oh, decidedly, I advocate a very thoroughgoing reform in the evening dress."

The young man's face was shining.

"Mr. Ferguson, sir," he cried, "if you don't mind my saying so, sir, you're wonderful, you're simply wonderful. I have followed your career with the utmost interest, and your versatility, sir, amazes me."

"My versatility?" Mr. Ferguson repeated, somewhat astonished. He was amused by the lad's evident sincerity.

"Well, you see, if you do not mind my saying so—usually a man in your position would not bother about details."

"But I explained to you that I consider nothing that increases or diminishes the comfort of women of trifling importance," Mr. Ferguson repeated patiently.

"Ah, you are wonderful," said the boy.

Mr. Ferguson suppressed a smile. The lad's repetition of the one phrase struck him as Henry Jamesque. He felt like asking the boy whether he was an admirer of Henry James. But he didn't. He inquired instead:

"Is it usual for reporters to compliment the men they interview as you are doing?"

"No," stammered the lad, "but, you see, I am a Socialist."

Matthew Ferguson laughed at the beautiful irrelevance of the reply. The boy's face grew crimson.

"I am afraid I am giving you the impression of being a fool," he said. "I meant to say, I am a Socialist in theory. I was brought up abroad, by an aunt who conducted a sort of salon of the old style in Paris, and many celebrities gathered there. That, too, is how I got to know so much about international scandals. When they found out what I knew on the 'Bulletin,' they made me write up these scandals of high and low life for the

Sunday paper, and I sign myself Baron de Montmorenci."

"Well, Baron," said Matthew, "I make a point of reading those scandals whenever I have the time, and it's bully good reading, though I cannot understand how a clean-cut lad like yourself can remember all those unsavory stories."

"Mr. Ferguson," the boy said earnestly, "it isn't my fault, now is it, that I have a memory which refuses to forget anything I have ever heard?"

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Ferguson reassuringly.

"Well, sir, there you are. My sad distinction is that there is not a disreputable character in Europe or America whom I do not know by report. If I can ever help you out, Mr. Ferguson——"

Mr. Ferguson thanked him for his offer. The boy continued to tell him of his life and his work on the "Bulletin"; he was reading law in the morning and at night, and he hoped to follow ultimately in the footsteps of his beau-ideal, who, of course, was none other than Matthew Ferguson himself.

Mr. Ferguson had believed that he was immune against the perfunctory flattery which the world at large is only too ready to lavish upon the successful man, cringing the while, and hoping to receive some small scraps of the big man's success in return. But he was not immune against the sincere admiration with which this boy was anointing him. He read honesty in the lad's face, loyalty in his eyes and manliness in his carriage. The interview ended by Matthew's offering to make him his confidential secretary, a position he had desired to create for some time.

Mr. Burbridge, alias Baron de Montmorenci, accepted with gratitude.

"It is said," remarked Matthew Ferguson, "that no man is great in the eyes of his valet. One might para-

phrase that, perhaps, to say that no man is great in the eyes of his secretary."

Tommy Burbridge protested.

"A day may come when you will disapprove of things I do."

"If I do, sir, I shall think that you are more experienced than I, and that you see an ultimate good in what you do which I do not perceive."

Mr. Ferguson gave the lad a quick look. As yet his hands were clean. Self-seeking he had been, but his self-seeking had taken the form of benevolence and philanthropy. Inevitably the day must come, when, as corporation counsel for two of the large Eastern railroads, some act of legal unethics would be required of him. It was against that day that he was preparing himself in attaching to his service a man of whose personal loyalty he might feel assured. Matthew Ferguson hazarded the shrewd guess that the personal magnetism he exerted upon other men and women would operate in the case of Tommy Burbridge with heightened vigor.

That same afternoon he paid his first call at the Fifth Avenue house since Mrs. van Duyskuk's return. The old lady received him with affability, but there was a touch of frigidity in her manner, insinuated so deftly, that it was impossible to tell wherein the frigidity consisted. Matthew, who had thought himself an expert in subtle shading of manner, tone and speech, marveled at the fine workmanship of Mrs. van Duyskuk's. He doubted whether he himself could have been as exquisite. He decided suddenly, instead of meeting indirection with indirection, to be straightforward and direct.

"What have I done to have my fairy godmother treat me so coldly?" he asked banteringly.

Mrs. van Duyskuk smiled wryly.

"Why resurrect that fiction when you refuse the fairy godmother's choicest gift?"

Matthew bit his lip, but continued with brutal directness.

"Miss Cravatt told you of our interview?"

"I do not know what you said to Miss Cravatt. She repeated nothing of what passed. But she allowed me to gather that she knew positively you did not care for her."

In spite of her habitual gentleness, which was so ingrained that it did not desert her in any crisis of life, the old lady seemed very wroth. There was a tyrannical expression in the lovely old face, which had flushed a soft rose color. She shook her head reprovingly.

"I could only infer that you told her frankly you did not care for her. How any man who considers himself a gentleman can contrive to tell a woman *that* is beyond my comprehension."

"I did not tell her that I did not love her. What sort of a savage do you take me for?" Mr. Ferguson laughed good-naturedly. "I told her frankly I loved another woman."

"Was that a less cruel way of conveying the same information?"

"I considered it the only manly thing to do, because, well—it's a difficult thing to put into words——"

"I did not think that Matthew Ferguson ever found difficulty in manipulating words."

"Great difficulty sometimes," admitted Matthew pleasantly. "Moreover, since you yourself drew my attention to Miss Cravatt's preference for me, it is not for me to question the delicacy or lack of delicacy in discussing *that*."

Mrs. van Duyskuk's color heightened. She bit her lips angrily.

"I did not expect insolence from you," she said, still in the mild tone of inoffensive rebuke.

"Insolence? Because I accept your standard of delicacy as my own——?" Mr. Ferguson spoke gently. "I dislike extremely to discuss this matter, but it must be done. The young lady's liking for me was so marked —I honestly believe she allowed it to be so marked because in a way I am several pegs lower on the social scale than herself—that, I repeat, I felt it was mere manliness to tell her my affections were engaged elsewhere."

"Not Alison Beecham?" Mrs. van Duyskuk remarked, speaking quickly and disdainfully.

If she had been a younger woman, Matthew Ferguson would have refused the information she demanded, framing his reply as a gibe against her vaunted delicacy. But seeing the excitement she was laboring under, which brought out very vividly her age and the infirmities inherent in age, his voice was gentle.

"No, I would not show the execrable taste to prefer an Alison Beecham to the good, sweet, tender woman who has honored me by caring for me, and who—although I love another woman—because of her sweetness and goodness, has the power to wound me to the quick, because I have unwittingly wounded her."

Mrs. van Duyskuk's color receded. The harsh look went from her face.

"You are a man at any rate," she said grudgingly.

He laughed pleasantly.

"Even if I am not a gentleman?"

"I am not quite certain whether you are or not," she replied mildly and unrebukingly.

"Are you very angry with me, still?" he asked.

The old woman seemed to be struggling with some strong emotion. Suddenly she spoke.

"It was not right for me to say what I said before.

Undoubtedly you are a gentleman, one of the truest and finest I have ever known. That is why I cannot forgive you for not returning Grace Cravatt's love."

"Dear lady," said Matthew Ferguson, his enchanting smile on his lips, "I do not expect you to forgive me. I cannot quite forgive myself. She is so completely, utterly good, that I feel myself base and mean for not snatching eagerly at the priceless gift of her love."

"Feeling that way for her—how can you say you love another?"

"There are many kinds of love, Mrs. van Duyskuk. Among women the feeling is common, I believe, that this or that man would make an admirable brother. Why then, will women persist in believing that men are so coarse-fibered, so low in disposition, as to be incapable of feeling the same innocent affection for a woman? I am deeply in love. I hope to win the woman I love as my wife, but this in no way bars me from feeling an honest affection, in which there is neither romance nor passion, for Grace Cravatt. Women always appear to doubt the possibility of such a feeling, yet I was never more sincere than I am now in declaring that the hours I spent with Grace Cravatt will be among the sweetest recollections of my life."

"You are in love with her, but you do not know it."

"I am distinctly not in love with her," he replied. "In love, romance and passion join hands. One does not see clearly, but apprehends through a golden haze. I see and apprehend very clearly everything pertaining to Grace Cravatt—her sterling qualities, her charm, her delightful femininity, but I do not love her."

"I am disappointed in you," she said, shaking her head.

"Why? Because, loving one woman, I do not disparage all other women? I am not the sort of man to

do that. On the other hand, since love has entered my heart, it seems to me that I see the divine quality in every woman more keenly than before. There are, thank heaven for it, many excellent women in the world. A man can love one only, and love comes and will not be bidden to come or to stay away. Love is an inner essence that evades mathematical calculation."

"I thought I understood you thoroughly," said Mrs. van Duyskuk, "and now it seems to me that I do not understand you at all."

"That is not my fault, but the fault of the conventional lies in which women immerse their lives. Women blame men because they believe that practically every man leads what polite society calls a 'man's life.' Women love to believe this thing, which sends a delightful shiver of moral indignation, of outraged virtue, down their backs. And yet it is a libel on the average man's character. Women pretend that, although they are capable of entering upon a platonic friendship, men are not capable of so doing. Yet the very fact that woman is in the waiting position, and cannot take the initiative, makes her more likely to capsize the frail craft of platonic friendship than her partner. Moreover, if a man continues indefinitely on a platonic footing, the woman, whether she cares for the man or not, resents it. All women, be they ever so virtuous, chaste and innocent, bask in the admiration of men, and in the heart of every one of your sex, dear lady, slumbers the conviction that at least a dozen men of her acquaintance would have loved her and no one else, if they had happened to meet her before they encountered their respective spouses, or if propinquity had furthered the growth of affection, and when man does not pay the expected homage woman chafes and loses her temper."

"Tell me about the woman you love. Is she rich or

poor? It would be a great mistake for you to marry a poor wife."

Matthew Ferguson smiled coldly.

"Pardon me," he said, "I am willing to discuss your favorite with you, but I decline to discuss with anyone the woman I love."

Mrs. van Duyskuk colored angrily under the rebuff.

"I am disappointed in you."

"Well, I am sorry," said he.

"I allowed you to see from the outset that my heart was set on your marrying as I wished. You allowed me to help you, to push you forward, to bring you into contact with the right men. You accepted my service, all the while withholding the fact that your love was bestowed elsewhere."

For the first time during this extraordinary interview Matthew Ferguson became angry. His anger was all the more ugly, because, mounting only on sparse occasions, it flamed, when kindled, with deadly heat. The old lady's aspersions opened many points of departure for a scathing reply. He, with his alert mind, trained to respond instantaneously to every impression, had a dozen of these replies at the tip of his tongue before she had ceased speaking. He longed to taunt her with the unwomanliness of reminding anyone of benefits bestowed; or to tell her that, without her intervention, Judge Witherspoon would have presented him to the very men whom she allowed him to meet; or, again, to tell her with brutal candor that she exaggerated the services she had rendered him, and that, in pretending that the services were real and not factitious, he had acted purely from the gallant motive of flattering one of woman's chief foibles, the belief that they help make men's careers. But, as usual, he quelled these imaginary sallies, and, because of the dual appeal to his compas-

sion made by her age and sex, he explained with lamb-like meekness.

"I was not in love at the time I became the recipient of your kindness. I saw the woman I love, the first time, the day after the dinner at which you and Judge Witherspoon launched me."

She regarded him in silence. He could see her soften visibly. All the hard, tyrannical lines in her face erased themselves. Her shoulders became less rigid, her position relaxed.

She bent forward and laid her hand on his, and, seeing how frail and thin it was, Matthew Ferguson was thankful that he had had the courage to swallow his pride and deal leniently with the little old lady.

"My dear boy," she said, "I have treated you shamefully. I apologize to you. You have borne yourself admirably throughout my grilling. I grilled you because I had to vent my disappointment on someone, and my anger made me say unjust and unbeautiful things to you. Forgive an old woman. It is not your fault that you are the type of man who is destined, just because he is a high-souled, honorable gentleman, to break a few hearts on his journey through life."

She passed her blue-veined hand through his hair with a gesture of affection.

"You are going to make one woman divinely happy," she said. "Please God she may be worthy of your love."

## CHAPTER VIII

*Mr. Ferguson Receives a Letter from His Cousin Amanda Which Makes Him Bestir Himself Mightily*

Willy-nilly, Mr. Ferguson was forced to leave his affair in Amanda's keeping through the winter. Her letters were as full of mystery as of promise, and upon at least two occasions Matthew wrote long letters in reply, venting the wrath which her enigmatical utterances had induced in him. But, having traced a record of his black displeasure upon the unoffending paper, he very wisely destroyed these monuments of his anger, realizing that nothing would be gained by sending them. He did not reply to Amanda's fulminations, but decided to pay the Harts a visit at Easter, and then, if Amanda's inventiveness was still at fault, to devise ways and means of his own for storming the stronghold of Doris Diberto's heart.

One morning early in March he found among his office mail a bulky envelope addressed in Amanda's writing. He threw it aside, with something like a snort of contempt, believing it another futile epistle, and proceeded to open his business letters, dictating to the faithful Tommy the gist of answers to be sent, and returning others to his desk for further consideration. Having considerably reduced the pile of letters by this sum-

mary method, he dismissed Tommy and, settling himself comfortably in his chair, nerved himself for the task of reading Amanda's communication. The very first sentence made him quicken with apprehension. The letter read:

"My dear Cousin Matthew,

"At last I have something definite to write you. You may have wondered at the seeming incoherence of my letters, and at their lack of everything tangible. The truth of the matter is I wrote so elusively with purposeful intention, for if I had reported to you the odd rumors which have been afloat for some time in St. Agnes-on-the-Falls, you would have rushed here and spoiled everything by your rashness and importunity.

Now, however, matters have come to a head, and your presence is desirable. Come as quickly as you can, and be prepared to remain at least a fortnight, perhaps a month. In your dual capacity of lover and lawyer, I feel you, of all men, are best fitted to deal with the singular danger which menaces Doris Diberto. It is impossible to exaggerate the gravity of that danger, and, after thinking over the matter for forty-eight hours, I feel that in justice to all concerned, to yourself, to Doris and those who must remain nameless for the present, it is wisest and best that you come here in ignorance of the status quo, so that you may be wholly unbiased. Indeed, to acquaint you with the details of this remarkable affair as it now stands would require a longer exposition than I have time to give you in this letter.

"Nor is this a subterfuge. Andrew is not well, and we have decided suddenly to go South until

April. We leave to-morrow morning, and I have most of my packing still to do.

"Telegraph me when you will arrive here. I have instructed our chauffeur, who remains in the house as caretaker, to open any despatch addressed to myself. He will meet the train on which you come. He is absolutely trustworthy, and you can rely upon him in any emergency. After you learn more about the condition of things here, you will understand what I mean.

"One thing more. Do not sign your own name to the telegram, nor have any letters addressed to St. Agnes-on-the-Falls in your own name. Assume any name that takes your fancy, and have your mail addressed in my care. The chauffeur will get it and deliver it to you, wherever you may lie in hiding while at the Falls.

"A word about the chauffeur—Gilbert Stuart. He is a college boy who broke down at the close of the junior year—touch of tuberculosis—and was forced to let his senior year drift until he regains his health. The Pocono Mountains were recommended to him, and my ever benevolent Andrew, hearing of the plight of the young chap, took him on as chauffeur. I write you explicitly so that you may know you are dealing with a man of education.

"Do not think I am needlessly cautious. After you have gone over the ground you will understand the necessity for keeping your identity secret. If it were known that the celebrated Matthew Ferguson was in St. Agnes-on-the-Falls, the news would spread like wildfire, and your hands would be tied at the outset. In your behalf, in Doris Dilberto's behalf as well, I thank heaven that I did not introduce you to her that midsummer eve. Her mother, the

only person to whom I presented you, is away, and she is such a scatterbrain that, as likely as not, she would not recall you.

"My dear, dear Matthew—I tremble lest I am not doing what is right. I mean, I am afraid that in sending for you I am doing something which will not make for your happiness. Andrew is violently and irrevocably opposed to your marriage with Doris. And yet I cannot let the unfortunate, friendless girl drift into the very jaws of the danger that hangs over her without letting you know that she is in danger. Justly, you would never forgive me after the catastrophe had occurred. Andrew has set his authority so resolutely against my advising you of the matter that it requires no mean degree of courage to write you as I am doing. I am fond of Doris, and I am very, very fond of you, nor can I share Andrew's strangely pessimistic belief, acquired I know not how, that marriage to Doris will bring you unhappiness.

"My dear Matthew—your happiness is very much my concern. I doubt if you realize how extremely fond we two middle-aged folk have grown of our young, successful and very wonderful kinsman.

"Whatever the ultimate outcome of this unspeakably strange business—I pray it may bring you happiness.

"Mrs. Pultney-Greene—I enclose a card to her—is the person you had best see first of all. As you will remember, she is Doris's companion, and devoted to the unfortunate girl-widow. She called on Andrew two nights ago, and besought him in tears, and almost on her knees, to find some way of helping Doris. Andrew was unable to convince her of his inability to do anything in the matter,

but it was that stormy, tearful interview between my husband and Doris's companion that finally impelled me to write you.

"Dear boy—my good prayers attend you.

"Affectionately,

"Amanda.

"I will mail our address to Mr. Stuart as soon as we are located for the winter."

Immediately Mr. Ferguson had finished reading this letter, he plunged his entire office force into violent activity. He despatched the office-boy for a time-table, he gave orders to clerks and dictated to his stenographer at the same time, all the while keeping Tommy chained to the telephone. Finally, Mr. Ferguson had a brief but weighty conversation with his chief, Mr. Cravatt, without whose knowledge and consent he was unable to leave town for any length of time.

"Certainly," said Mr. Cravatt; "stay away as long as you want. Business is slack at present, and it's a good plan to rest up now. Leave your address with your secretary."

Matthew heaved a sigh of relief as he hung up the receiver. He hated to think what sort of a situation would have ensued if Mr. Cravatt had refused to allow him to leave town.

Amanda's warning to guard against discovery of his identity was so insistent that, calling Mr. Burbridge to his desk, he said:

"Tommy, I am going off on a personal matter of extraordinary character. I want no one but yourself to know where I am going. Address me as Montrose French, care Mrs. A. Hart, St. Agnes-on-the-Falls, and give my address to no one. No mail goes to Matthew

Ferguson. All letters go to Montrose French. Mum is the word, my boy."

Then, sallying forth, he bought a complete new outfit of clothes, the various ingredients of which partook of the general vague, nondescript character affected by modern man, so that, when attired in his new garments, instead of presenting the delicate color scheme in agreeable browns which had made of him so conspicuous a figure in the streets of the metropolis, he looked quite as piebald and commonplace as the average man.

No man knew better than Matthew Ferguson the value of sound mental habits, and the unwisdom of lax ones. He knew that idle speculation is a corrosive bound to react fatally upon that ability to reach quick decisions which forms the very mainspring of efficiency for a man of affairs. Although no one suspected it, he had battled all his life to overcome a tendency toward idle speculation, which came all too easily to the scholar part of him, and the strength of his will-power was never evidenced so gloriously as when he succeeded in banishing all anxiety concerning the woman he loved from his mind while he was preparing himself for her service.

It was only after he was finally ensconced in a chair of the Pullman of the rapidly moving train that he allowed his thoughts to dwell upon the danger which was menacing her. He could not help wishing that Amanda had been a trifle more explicit. And yet, in writing that letter, Amanda had shown a foresight and general competence which are sometimes attained, under violent stress, by persons of no unusual intellectual endowments. Her reasons for leaving him in the dark as to the danger that threatened Doris must have been potent, and by no stretch of the imagination could he conjure up a vision of what that danger was. All he seemed able to think of was murder, but somehow murder seemed

too crude a procedure to fit into the picture. Besides, if Doris was in danger of assassination, her companion would surely have summoned a private detective to ferret out the persons who had designs on Doris's life. There were other crimes, of course, but it was equally inconceivable that Amanda should have summoned him to deal with contemplated arson, for instance, or a projected burglary. He was convinced that the nature of the intended crime was more subtle, more masked and decidedly less commonplace than murder, arson or burglary. The more he thought about the matter, now that he had leisure for thought, the more mystified he became. His thoughts ran around in a circle, without any success in forming a definite notion concerning the danger which threatened Doris Diberto.

As the train pulled out of Stroudsburg, it ran into a snow flurry, which, a quarter of an hour later, developed into a full-sized snow-storm. By the time the train reached Cresco, the snow storm threatened to become a blizzard. All the wonderland of purplish mountains and greenish-gray meadow-land, of virgin forest, growing like a scrubby head upon the sloping mountain sides, of cuplike valleys, of baby mountain peaks dimpled at the top as by a giant's knuckle, was effectually screened by that curtain of driving snow. Matthew Ferguson, whose nerves were not as steady as he might have wished, felt the awe and the charm of the storm, and the fear which was gnawing at his heart was not diminished thereby.

When he alighted at his station, it was snowing so impenetrably that he could distinguish nothing except the blurred outlines of the depot. While he was trying to accustom his eyes to the gray atmosphere which shrouded this still white world, someone tapped him on the shoulder and, turning, he saw a tall, slim young

man, with a cadaverous face, wearing a drab rain coat and a chauffeur's cap. The snow had frozen to his moustache, and drew his lip into a comical shape as he spoke.

"Looking for anyone?" he drawled.

"Yes, for Mrs. Andrew Hart's chauffeur."

"That's me."

"I'm Montrose French."

'Mr. French! Um." The cadaverous one drew off his gloves with great deliberation, and Matthew wondered for what he was preparing. The elaborate preparation turned out to be a preliminary of the quickest twiddling of thumbs Matthew had ever witnessed.

The cadaverous one, continuing to turn cartwheels with his thumbs at break-neck space, drawled out lazily, and so slowly that Matthew wondered how he could contrive to be so speedy with his fingers and so slow with his tongue at one and the same time.

"French—that may be the name, and again, it mayn't be. How am I to know?"

"By my alias, Matthew Ferguson."

"Right you are, this way, please, Mr. Montrose French."

As they sped away through the still white world, Matthew began questioning his guide.

"You know on what business I came?"

"I do."

"Mrs. Hart left me wholly in the dark as to what's amiss up this way. I wonder whether you can tell me one or two things?"

"I can."

"I am very glad of that. It is going to help me a lot."

"I do not see how."

"You don't see how?" Matthew repeated blankly, somewhat taken back. "Why, man, it's very simple. I

must know what is wrong at the Manor before I can attempt to right the wrong, don't you understand?"

"And how are you going to get the information?"

Mr. Ferguson was staggered. Was the man a simpleton, or merely posing as one. He shrugged his shoulders a little impatiently.

"Didn't you promise to give me the information I want, just now?"

"I did not," said the cadaverous one. "To be exact, Montrose French, alias Matthew Ferguson, you asked me whether I am able to tell you one or two things, and I replied in the affirmative. Now mark you, in the first place, if you had asked me not whether I can but whether I will tell you one or two things, I would just as truthfully and with the same degree of precision have replied that I would. And, in the second place, I replied in substance that I can tell you one or two things, and so I can, though, as you did not specify what the one or two things are, it is not likely that the one or two things which you want to know and the one or two things I want to tell you are the same. Now, selecting one or two things at random out of several thousand things that I could tell you, I might, for instance, inform you that it is snowing almighty hard, and that, quite likely, if the wind springs up at nightfall, we'll have as pretty a blizzard as the East is famous for having in March. That's really two things, but let it go at a bargain as one. Then, for another thing, I might tell you that winter is cold and summer is hot; that those who pretend to despise money desire it most; that a sick man's wish for death is the desire to have done with something unpleasant; in fact, considering that I have not yet taken my degree, it is really surprising how many things of real consequence I could oblige you with, Mr. Alias.

Though, as I mentioned before, nothing I tell you may convey the enlightenment you seek."

Matthew had at first been inclined to rage at the fellow's discursiveness, but it was impossible to take offense, so good-natured was Gilbert Stuart's entire manner.

"Look here, Stuart," Mr. Ferguson began, "why string me? I am looking forward to a pretty bad time, and if you can make it a little easier for me by giving me a few hints, why not do it?"

The loquacious Stuart, who seemed to think in figures, drawled his words with provoking slowness.

"In the first place, because it is hard for any man to talk coherently while he is driving a machine through a blinding snow-storm. In the second place, I, in particular, can never impart serious information without twiddling my thumbs, which, manifestly, I cannot do at the moment. In the third place, the story is so long-winded that a naturally long-winded person like myself would wind it out to such a degree that there is no saying whether the story would run through ten volumes or through twenty. In the fourth place, because I have a natural disinclination for gossip. In the fifth place, because I am really not fond of hearing myself talk, though you may think so, because I am talking now, while, in fact, I talk only when I cannot help myself. In the sixth place, because the thing is none of my business. In the seventh place, because I really do not know as much about the affairs at Diberto Manor as you think. In the seventh place——"

"Eighth," Matthew, interrupted him pleasantly, as if he were thoroughly enjoying his tormentor's linguistic perambulations, "it's the eighth point you are making."

"In the eighth place," said Stuart solemnly, "in the eighth place, in the eighth—dang it, man, you've put

me out. Come back, oh my gamboling thoughts—because—because—I'll have to skip the eighth place, I see. In the ninth place, because to talk when I am driving full force against the wind, is very bad for my lungs. In the tenth place—dang it, man, how long are you going to listen to this twaddle?"

Matthew Ferguson laughed pleasantly.

"I thought I would wait for your invention to give out," he said.

"Well, it hasn't given out, not by a long shot," said the young man. "But any decent man, any humane man, any man with eleemosynary tendencies such as your entire public life convicts you of having, would have stopped me at the ninth place, when I delicately called your attention to the poor condition of my wind pipes. A public philanthropist like yourself ought to show immediate and overwhelming interest in an object of compassion like myself."

"Well, you see, Mr. Stuart, at present the public philanthropist is swallowed up in the private citizen. I'm an honest soul, and I tell you candidly that at the present moment your wind-pipes can take you to the devil for all I care. I have only one thought and—goal—and that is to get information about the Manor House."

Stuart turned and looked Mr. Ferguson squarely in the eyes.

"Come now, Matthew Ferguson," he said, "I like you, and to be frank with you I was not inclined either to like or trust you because of your fame. You seemed too disinterested for any normal man, with all your charities, and benefactions, and lawsuits in behalf of the down-trodden. But what you said just now rang true. You're no hypocrite, and so I'll tell you the truth."

"Thank goodness," sighed Matthew Ferguson.

"The truth concerning my refusal to tell you about

the Manor," Stuart pursued, "is this. Mrs. Hart asked me to observe silence and she has been so kind to me that to disobey her slightest wish would be black ingratitude."

Matthew said no more. Amanda's reasons, he thought, for leaving him in ignorance must have been strong. They sped on in silence through the world of magical whiteness. Every sound was muffled as if the battalions of descending snow-flakes were so many tiny blankets fashioned to deaden sound and to invalidate every law of acoustics. The machine now raced over that part of the road, darker and more sinister than ever, where Lawrence Diberto had been killed. In spite of its white drapery, the place looked black and wicked. They flashed past hemlock grove and maples, and then, turning a graceful curve, the huge red car swung smoothly into the Manor grounds. Suddenly it swerved, slackened speed and jarred to a standstill. A woman had stepped out into the road, signaling with lifted hand for them to stop.

Stuart, evidently thinking her some pedestrian who had lost her way and whose strength was failing, bent far over the edge of the car, and called out to her.

"Where do you want to go? I'm going to the upper village, but not——" he interrupted himself. "Heavens," he exclaimed, his drawl gone for once, "It's Mrs. Pultney-Greene."

"Yes, and I must speak to Doctor Hart. I must!"

Stuart leaned far back, flattening himself against the back of his seat to admit of the possibility of conversation between his passenger and the lady. Before Mr. Ferguson, who was dumfounded by the turn affairs had taken, was able to reveal his identity, the lady broke into spasmodic speech.

"Doctor Hart," she cried, her voice sounding oddly

hollow and loud in that leviathan stillness, "you see before you a desperate woman. I am determined to put an end to the impossible situation. You must listen to me once more."

Although a meager three yards interposed between himself and the lady, it was impossible for him to distinguish her features, so dim was the light because of the obscuring snow. Mr. Ferguson concluded that the wisest thing to do was to allow her to continue in error as to his identity until they reached shelter, for it was evidently not her intention to continue the interview in the open. The wind had risen, and the whirling particles of snow tortured the skin like so many red-hot needle-points.

Springing from the machine, he ran to Mrs. Pultney-Greene, and opening the door to the rear seats of the car, offered to assist her into it. Fortunately she did not look at him, as his height would have betrayed him, and Stuart came gallantly to his assistance by asking her for instructions as to where to drive.

"To the pavilion," said the lady, and proceeded forthwith to wrap her black lace scarf about her face.

Stuart backed the machine away from the stone fence, into which he had nearly run the car, regained the road, and then, with fresh impetus, turned the nose of the car into the curving road of the Manor. He did not run it up the broad driveway that led to the mansion, but followed a road that described a huge semicircle past and downward from the mansion. The car circled the terrace on which the mansion stood, and, by many devious turns, entered a narrow drive through the woodland of young chestnut trees, standing in clean-cut, soldierly erectness. At the end of the drive, built upon overhanging rock against the sheer edge of a deep chasm, stood a small building, in the shape of an octagon, and

connected, by a bridge, with a smaller octagon. Matthew guessed it to be the pavilion which was their destination.

He sprang from his seat, as the car stopped, and still, without speaking, helped Mrs. Pultney-Greene to alight. She took the arm he offered her in silence, but hardly had they walked two steps when she turned back to Stuart, who stood flapping his arms as if they were wings, in the manner in which a Russian winter scene is made so graphic upon the stage.

"Mr. Stuart, it is too cold for you to remain here. Will you not follow us?"

"Thank you." Stuart loped easily to Mrs. Pultney-Greene's side. "Don't you think you would like me to unlock the pavilion for you?" he inquired solicitously. "I could also light the fire, you know. Every few minutes tell in this Arctic cold."

"You are very kind, very thoughtful."

"Not at all." Stuart, although the key was now in his possession, and he had no excuse for loitering, did loiter, and Matthew Ferguson blessed him inwardly for his loyalty, for it was quite evident that this odd character, in order to serve his new friend, was claiming the lady's attention, so that she might not discover that the man whose arm she had taken was not Doctor Hart.

Finally, they entered the pavilion. The small, octagonal room was sumptuously furnished. Fine old tapestries clothed the walls, and the furniture was of such *de luxe* appearance that even Matthew Ferguson, who knew so little of different styles of furnishings that he could scarcely have told a Chippendale chair from a Louis Quartorze divan, was struck by its luxuriance, and hazarded the guess that Lawrence Diberto had built and equipped the tiny cottage as a refuge where he and

his bride could taste the sweetness of utter isolation from the world.

While Mrs. Pultney-Greene was unwinding her lace scarf, from her head, and Stuart was coaxing the log fire to burn—for the wood had already been placed—Matthew stood in front of a tiny *prie-Dieu,* wonderfully carved in pear-tree wood and upholstered in turquoise blue velvet on which were sprinkled silver stars. The book which lay open on the rack of this praying-stool was not a religious book, but a volume of Shelley's poems, and, glancing at the page that stared up at him, Matthew saw the book was open at "The Ode to a Skylark."

Matthew experienced a horrid feeling of fear, and jealousy and helplessness. The man who had conceived this building and its furnishings had indeed been a past-master of those many minor arts which to a woman of refinement and artistic tendencies must be as myrrh and frankincense.

He pulled himself away from these distressing reflections, and gave his attention to Mrs. Pultney-Greene.

Despite her fifty odd years, she was still a strikingly handsome woman. Her head in repose, as she watched Stuart busying himself with logs and andirons, was regal. Her face was almost as white as her hair, and she had the air of a woman to whom abundant homage has been done both because of her beauty and her station. Matthew felt intuitively that she was difficult, and decided to plunge into conversation, so that, taking her by surprise, the advantage might be his.

"Madame," he said, as Stuart rose from the floor and went out of the room, "I consider it time to tell you that the person whom you accosted is not Doctor Hart."

She turned with a faint gesture of surprise and viewed him tranquilly.

"Why person—are you afraid to describe yourself as a gentleman or a man?"

"Not in the least. But I intended that the pleasure attaching to a discovery as to which term I deserve should be yours."

"I am past the age when cleverness at repartee compensates for lack of character," she said, acidly. "Be good enough to inform me, sir, what your motive was in taking such ungentlemanly advantage of my mistake. The chauffeur certainly was Doctor Hart's."

"I allow the adjective to pass unchallenged. You will beg my pardon for it after a while. The chauffeur certainly was Doctor Hart's, and had been sent to call for me for the express purpose of conveying me to you."

"You interest me."

"Madame, Mrs. Hart, who is my cousin by marriage, wrote me, acquainting me with your repeated requests for assistance addressed to her husband."

An odd change came over Mrs. Pultney-Greene. The frigid contempt with which she had regarded Mr. Ferguson changed to stealthy alarm. She was more subtly on the defensive than before.

"Why did Mrs. Hart take such action?" she inquired neutrally.

"For one thing because she knew that you were in great anxiety of some sort about Doris Diberto."

"Since you speak of one reason, there must be another. What is it? Why should this have been communicated to you?"

For one brief moment Matthew Ferguson hesitated. The woman before him, even in her decadence, bore such traces of having been a fêted beauty in her day, and of having enjoyed her reign, that he doubted the sagacity of pouring out his heart to her, fearing lest there linger in her something of the coquette, some-

thing of the strange, inexplicable feeling which makes so many women, of whatever age, resent seeing a man devotedly in love with any other woman. Then, he remembered that her agony of fear, of which Amanda had written, was solely on behalf of Doris. Looking at her, he realized that this woman was too broad for that curious species of promiscuous jealousy, and that, even in her youth, a man would have been safe in telling her of his love for another woman, and in dwelling upon it, because she would have seen in it not an insult levied against her own individuality, but a compliment to the sex of which she was a representative member.

"The second reason for Cousin Amanda's writing me is that I love Doris Diberto."

"How can that be?" she inquired, her countenance absolutely immobile. "I have never seen you, and, for years, almost all her life, Mrs. Diberto has scarcely been out of my sight. The only exception was her honeymoon, which she and her husband spent here, at the Manor, and during that time they received absolutely no visitors. You will have to invent a better reason, I am afraid, to explain your presence."

"I assure you that I am speaking the truth, although you are entirely right in your supposition that Doris Diberto does not know me. I——"

She interrupted him with so magnificent an air that an interruption, from being an indecorum, became an ornament of manner.

"Is it the custom of the circle in which you move to speak of ladies to whom you have not even been introduced by their first names?"

Mr. Ferguson did the unexpected. He smiled, and before that brilliant, whimsical smile of his, which had

never yet failed of its magical effect, the Englishwoman thawed and softened.

"Dear Mrs. Pultney-Greene," he said, in a soft, caressing voice, "no disrespect was implied by my reference to Doris Diberto as Doris Diberto. I told you that I love her. To give her the title of married woman inevitably brings to mind that one man has already enjoyed that place in her affections to which I aspire."

Mrs. Pultney-Greene shrugged her handsome shoulders.

"I saw her last midsummer eve, at the festival, and I fell in love with her. That is all."

"Ridiculous!"

Matthew's manner became animated. He launched into his story, and his fine voice echoed and reverberated while he was talking. He could see that the woman before him was bracing herself against its effect. When he stopped speaking she made one admission.

"You are younger in sentiment than I thought. You are merely in love with her, but you do not love her. You mistake passion for love, for the sentiment which leaps full-blown into life at mere sight must not be dignified by the sacred name of love."

"You are mistaken," he retorted. "I withheld one fact from you. I overheard something that she said to a tall, soldierly man, and that something was sufficient to reveal to me the beauty of character of the woman with whom, at first sight, I had fallen in love so violently."

"What was that 'something?'"

"This: he had condoled with her on her mother's poor health, expressing a fear, you understand, that she might lose her mother. And she replied, 'I realize that death will take her from me sooner or later. I cannot hope to keep her always, for I must not wish that, of us two, she should outlive me. I can think of no more cruel experi-

ence for a mother than that of outliving her child. I hope and pray my mother may be spared that affliction.'"

For the first time the handsome woman to whom he was speaking showed emotion.

"Yes," she said, "unselfishness is the keynote of Doris's character. And so you believe you love her?"

"My dear lady! Believe? Do we believe we are freezing from cold or perishing from hunger or burning in a flame while we are cold or hungry or burning—or do we *know* it? Let me tell you that before seeing her I had always known that some day the very thing that did happen to me would happen.

"I am aware that there is, in regard to the relationship between the two sexes, a certain nomenclature which it is difficult to discard. I am aware that to you my experience must appear at best a juvenile efflorescence, at worst, because of its unconventional character, it must savor of vulgarity. But I say to you, and I say it with all the sincerity that is in me, I see in this falling-in-love of mine a higher origin than you and the world at large may ascribe to it.

"I believe that this sudden mounting of joy, this transcendent stimulation of all the mysterious forces that dwell in the human heart is of spiritual as well as of earthly origin. There is something sacred in this attraction of personality to personality, even in friendship, and into this feeling of mine for Doris there enter the magic of sex, the witchery of soul, the fascination which a supremely beautiful woman must always exert upon a man. Yet beyond all this, I repeat, there is that which is indefinable, intangible, something that grapples me to her with hooks of steel. Do not ask me to explain the feeling. I cannot do it, I know it is there, just as we know there are life and death, and yet not you nor I nor any man can define them and say what they are.

"And this feeling is so strong that I bow before it in spite of the fact that Doris lacks two qualifications which I have always demanded in my wife. Her mother is a vulgarian; there is no escaping that fact, and I, Mrs. Pultney-Greene, can trace my family back to the Norman Conquest; then, she has been married before, and my heart has always clamored for a woman untouched by the very image of a man. Conceive, then, if you can, how strong is the feeling that draws me to her. I believe, too, that she is proud, and my ideal is a woman who is gentle. But it does not matter; nothing matters; I feel myself impelled by a force stronger than myself. She is the woman whom Nature meant for me, and that is all there is to it. Win her I will, win her I must."

He had spoken with tremendous passion, and, after a brief pause, he demanded: "Is it possible that you still doubt me, or mistrust my sincerity?"

A smile lighted the pale, proud face. The cold gray eyes regarded him fixedly for a moment.

"You have impressed me more than I care to own. Kindly attribute any questions I ask not to mistrust but to caution."

"Ask what you will."

"First of all, how am I to know that you are in truth Mrs. Hart's cousin?"

He handed her the letter of introduction, and his own card, smiling whimsically the while.

"Of course, I may have stolen both Cousin Amanda's card and my own." He took from his wallet a handful of his business cards, and spread them out upon the lady's lap. "Unless you look upon me as a murderer as well as a burglar you can hardly suppose that I came by the entire stock of Matthew Ferguson's cards dishonestly."

"Not *the* Mr. Ferguson?" she queried, without hiding her surprise.

"*The* Mr. Ferguson," he assured her solemnly.

"We live a retired life at the Manor," she said, "but even we have heard of your fame. Forgive me, Mr. Ferguson, if I put one more question. How am I to know that you come as a friend, and are not suborned by Doris's enemies?"

"Dear lady," he said gravely, "does not my cousin's introduction—and my character—vouch for my sincerity?"

"Oh," she cried, with the first show of emotion which she had made. "I should never forgive myself if, after all, you were not a friend, if I were to betray Doris to her enemies? No, no, forgive me, Mr. Ferguson. The suspicion is unjust. Your entire past marks you as a man in whom to repose confidence."

She closed her eyes and leaned far back in the large gilt armchair in which she was sitting. For a moment he thought she had fainted, but she repeated his name over and over again, as if it were an invocation, and, so singular are the workings of the human mind, his sense of humor and not a sense of triumph was in the ascendant at the moment, for, surely, it was supremely ludicrous that his career of insincerity should be received as a token of sincerity here, where he was utterly sincere.

Suddenly she spoke.

"I suspected you of being a fortune-hunter," she said. "That ghost also is laid." She shivered. "There is little time. There are things, also, which I wish you to see for yourself. How long do you stay here?"

"As long as you need me. I am entirely at your service."

Her face lighted up with joy.

"Good," she said. "Then I must find means of intro-

ducing you into the house as a member of the household. I have thought of calling in a lawyer, and would have done so had I known to whom to turn. Therefore I am not wholly unprepared. Are you willing to be introduced as my secretary?"

"Perfectly."

"That is, I think, the best plan, as it gives me an excuse for laying the affairs, the business affairs, before you."

"Do you mean to tell me that the huge Diberto estate is not in the hands of a solicitor now?"

"No, that is one of the troubles. Lawrence Diberto made his wife executor, and she is unfit to look after the big interests involved."

"How unfit?" A horrid fear clutched at Matthew's heartstrings.

"An inexperienced woman like her!"

"Ah!" His fear receded, but, although temporarily dismissed, it hovered in the background of his thoughts, latent, but not dead.

"She leaves everything to me. I, too, naturally, am unable to cope with affairs of such magnitude. Equally, of course, I dare not ask advice of Colonel Chalmers, whose business judgment is sound. I dare not admit to him that we need advice, though I am certain he knows it."

"Who is Colonel Chalmers?"

"A first cousin of Lawrence Diberto's mother. He is probably the tall, soldierly man whom you saw that evening. Doris has no relatives, except her mother, who is a sick woman, and Lawrence Diberto's will provides that, in case of his wife's death without issue, the estate goes to Colonel Chalmers, or, in case of his death, reverts to his daughter Amy."

Matthew Ferguson asked bluntly:

"This is no time for mincing words. What do you fear? Murder?"

"No; not murder."

"Surely, an old man cannot hope to marry her, the widow of his nephew?"

"I am convinced that possibility never crossed his mind."

"Is he using undue influence of any sort? Does she defer unduly to his opinion, I mean?"

"She detests him."

"I can think of no other villainy," said Matthew Ferguson.

Mrs. Poultney-Greene avoided his eyes.

"Colonel Chalmers is a very subtle, a very refined villain," she said.

Matthew Ferguson reminded himself that, if he wished to be of use to the woman he loved, he must not allow his reason to be clouded by any of the passions, not by love, anger, hatred, vindictiveness. He strove to master the emotion that was stirring in him.

"Do you see much of the Chalmers? Where do they live?"

"They live in Virginia. The Chalmers are good old Southern blood. But they are land-poor, and have been since the War. We see much of them, because they spend two and three weeks with us at a time."

"Why, when Doris detests them?"

Mrs. Poultney-Greene's handsome white face seemed to settle into marble.

"Doris sees very little of them, even when they are at the Hall!"

"How does she contrive to do that?"

Mrs. Pultney-Greene did not reply at once. Her face looked unutterably weary, and, for all her previous frankness in replying to his questions, she seemed reluctant

to answer his last query. He was forced to repeat his question.

"Since her husband's death Doris sees very little of anyone," she made the statement crisply.

The horrid fear which Mr. Ferguson had held in leash leapt into the foreground of his thoughts and clutched with almost physical violence at heart and throat. He had the curious sensation that the question he wished to ask was a tangible thing, waiting to be propelled. But a look into the face of the white, still woman seated opposite him held him silent. Her eyes were riveted on his face with an expression of gentle pleading that said as plainly as words: "Do not ask me; do not ask me *that.*"

"You are not very well," he said, gently. "Shall we return to the Hall?"

She came and stood close beside him and laid one long, slim hand of blue-veined marble upon his arm.

"Forgive me," she said, "I trust you, and yet I fear. Do you not see how much I love her? It is impossible to exaggerate the difficulty of the task that awaits you, and, unless you love her with a love that knows neither fear nor hesitation nor repining—that asks no reward, giving itself freely, incessantly, unstintingly—you had better turn back now."

"I love her," he said, simply. "Take me to her, that I may devise ways and means of saving her."

"If you can! If you can!" All pride, arrogance and contempt were gone from the woman's face. "If you can make her love you, it will be the only way of saving her that I can see."

Matthew glanced quickly about the apartment. Mrs. Pultney-Greene interpreted the glance.

"You are entirely different from him," she said, "and that is in your favor. Men love the same type of woman,

but no woman will love a man who reminds her of a man whom she has loved and lost. There is, to a woman, an indelicacy in connecting thoughts of one man with thoughts of another."

"I realize how difficult it will be to eclipse the memory of the man who built this little tabernacle, this holy of holies, for his love," said Matthew Ferguson. "How he must have loved her," he added, under his breath.

"I have my own opinion as to that," said Mrs. Pultney-Greene. "Do not misunderstand me. He was a charming lover-husband; he thought of a hundred and one eccentric things with which to prove his love. But, in fairness to you, to strengthen you for the battle in which you are about to engage, I must tell you that I do not believe he would have been capable of doing what you are about to do for her."

"Thank you," said Mr. Ferguson.

"By what name do I introduce you?"

He gave her his alias, explaining that he had chosen a name with the same initials as his own, as all his linen was marked, and it was impossible, at short notice, to get together a complete new equipment."

Matthew crossed the bridge to the smaller octagon, to summon Stuart. The small room was a fully equipped kitchen and Matthew marveled anew at the fertility which Lawrence Diberto had exhibited on all the small occasions of life. Somehow Mrs. Pultney-Greene's deadly parallel, which tallied with Andrew's estimate of the dead man's character, heartened him considerably. If he was not the lesser man of the two it was for him to prove it.

He thanked Stuart for his loyalty. In reply, Stuart pulled a very large, cheap-looking watch from his pocket.

"That," said he, "is a Waterbury. It's not pretty to look at. But it's dependable. Longwinded, but reliable.

That's me, Matthew Ferguson. I'm a human Waterbury. Longwinded, and not pretty to look at, but faithful."

Matthew shook the honest fellow vigorously by the hand, and together they crossed the bridge, after pushing the blazing logs far back into the fireplace, so that, in toppling over, they might do no damage, and, after performing the same act of caution in the larger room, the three left the Pavilion and entered the automobile.

## CHAPTER IX

*Mr. Ferguson Stands Face to Face with the Most Difficult Task That Has Ever Confronted Him, and Girds His Loins for Battle Royal*

It was almost six o'clock of an intensely dark night when Mrs. Pultney-Greene and Mr. Ferguson alighted at the Hall. The upper windows were unlighted, making the spacious mansion appear gloomy and forbidding. Diberto Hall was built in the Victorian "double-house" fashion, the dining-room lying to the right of a spacious hall, the parlors to the left. Various wings abutted at unexpected angles from the sides to accommodate a vast library and a hardly less vast music room. In all, the mansion contained over forty rooms.

The front of the hall was brilliantly lighted by an electrolier, but the hall itself was so cavernous that, in its rear depths, huge shadows lay against the oak wainscoting, black with age, and against the mahogany stairs.

The door was opened by an ancient serving-man in evening dress. His sparse white hair, through which his scalp showed pink as an infant's, gave him a venerable appearance. The old butler, evidently a family heirloom, was too well trained to show any surprise when Mrs. Pultney-Greene said to him:

"Hopkins, through a misunderstanding Mr. French arrived ahead of time. He will occupy the room adjoining my office, where, as my secretary, he will spend

most of his time. Kindly see that the room is prepared for him at once."

"Very well, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. If you please, sir, to follow me."

"We dine at six-thirty, Mr. French," said Mrs. Pultney-Greene in her most distant manner. "If you can make it possible to be punctual, Mrs. Diberto as well as I will be gratified."

"Very well, certainly, Mrs. Pultney-Greene."

Diberto Hall had been built before architects were under the necessity of stinting themselves in the matter of space. Down a long hall they went after reaching the second floor, turned into another corridor, then down three steps and up four until, finally, they entered the room which Mrs. Pultney-Greene had referred to as the "office." Adjoining this large apartment was a somewhat smaller one, which Mr. Ferguson was to occupy. Mr. Ferguson had the impression that he was being furtively watched by Hopkins, who, after switching on the electric light, turned on the steam-heat and busied himself about the lock of a window, suggesting that, as the air of the room was very stuffy, it might be agreeable to Mr. French to have the footman or the maid open it while he was dining.

"Thank you," said Matthew Ferguson, pleasantly. "I think I will open it at once."

"You are not afraid of taking cold, sir?"

"Not in the least."

The immaculate butler immediately opened it, before Matthew could reach the window, and adjusted the shutters to a nicety, so that there might be air but no draught.

Matthew Ferguson, meanwhile, opened the dress-suit case, and, in searching for a handkerchief, spread his linen, which was of the best, on the bed. When he

turned he saw the butler's gaze directed midway between himself and the bed in an inscrutable stare.

"If you please, sir, shall I send Jeames to attend on you, sir? Jeames, sir, attends Colonel Chalmers when he is here, and he used to attend on the Late Lamenteds One, Two, and Three, sir, until the Late Lamented Number Three, after the death of the Late Lamented Number One, who would never hear of separate valets, sir, got a valet of his own."

"Pray, who are the Late Lamenteds One, Two, and Three, or, rather, who were they?" demanded Matthew.

"Old master, Pietro Diberto, sir, was Number One. Number Three was young Master Lawrence Diberto."

"And what happened to Number Two?"

The butler sniffed.

"Properly speaking, sir, and being forced by truth to admit that which is properly improper, sir, the Late Lamented Number Two was a bad egg, sir, a very bad egg, so that, strictly speaking, so to say, sir, he is not lamented at all, though courtesy, sir, family feeling, proper pride, sir, impel us to speak of him in the same way as we speak of his brother."

"Was Master Lawrence his brother?"

"He was, sir, his twin brother, and as much alike they were as two eggs. But there's a difference in eggs, sir, if not on the surface, then on the inside. And inside, sir, Master Lawrence and Master Vincent were as unlike as a good and a rotten egg, sir."

"And Master Vincent is dead, also?"

"Drowned himself dead, sir. Nothing left of him, sir, but his 'at."

"His hat?"

"Yes, sir. Jeames and I found the 'at, sir, at the edge of Diberto Pool, where Master Vincent had drowned himself by the neck, sir, until he was dead."

Matthew stifled a laugh.

"Why——?" he inquired, politely.

"Well, sir, it was because old master and he had a quarrel, sir, about a paper to which young master had put old master's name."

"I see," said Mr. Ferguson.

"Did you say, sir, as I was to send Jeames to attend on you, sir?"

"Hang it, Hopkins, do I look like a man who is accustomed to a valet?"

"Truth compels me to admit, sir, that you do. Begging your pardon, sir."

"Well, then, Hopkins, appearances are dead against me. I wouldn't know what to do with a valet if I had one."

"Very good, sir, thank you, sir."

"What are you thanking me for, Hopkins?"

"It's a 'abit of mine, sir. I was brought up in a poor-'ouse, sir, where it was the 'abit to give thanks for h'everything, so that, sir, it was a sort of perpetual thanksgiving with us, sir, though, to be sure, the things we gave thanks for, sir, were not turkey and cranberry sauce and the usual things we give thanks for here."

"What were they, Hopkins?"

"Pruans, sir, and pork-pies, pinches and parsnip pudding."

"Well, Hopkins, this is not a poor-house and your childhood seems a good many miles off, and I am a poor duffer of a secretary, who, I imagine, will have to thank you far more often than you will have to thank me."

"I'm not so sure, sir."

"Of what, Hopkins?"

"If you please, sir, I had almost forgotten myself, sir. Thank you, sir."

"There you go again, Hopkins."

"Yes, sir, thank——"

"Of what aren't you so sure, Hopkins?"

"Truth, sir, forces me—I've forgotten, sir."

Matthew laughed and vigorously began brushing his hair with a pair of military brushes. Still the admirable butler stood there, waiting deferentially.

"Anything I can do for you, Hopkins?" asked Matthew Ferguson pleasantly. "Or anything you want to do for me?"

"Thank you, sir, no sir, though I do want to say, sir, that if you require Jeames, sir, please to ring the middle bell-rope; for Molly, the chambermaid, the bell-rope on the left, sir. But if there is any confidential service you require day or night, sir, the bell-rope on the right is for me. Thank you, sir." And, the personification of dignity, Hopkins walked out.

At the open door he halted.

"The first bell rings at quarter-past six, sir, and the ladies usually go down at once. Thank you, sir."

Mr. Ferguson had wished to be alone, but now that he was alone an intolerable nervousness swept over him. He was on the threshold of the great adventure at last. Within half an hour he was to see the woman he had loved so madly, so whole-heartedly for almost a year, and, firm as was his faith in her, the very passion and enthusiasm which he brought to the saving and wooing and winning of her suffered a momentary reaction, and he felt unnerved. He was sorely beset by fears and filled with doubt, he knew not of what.

He dressed as quickly as possible and, feeling that inaction and solitude were intolerable, he left his room as soon as he had finished and went in search of Mrs. Pultney-Greene. The first bell rang just as he entered the large hall of the lower floor, where Mrs. Pultney-Greene was waiting for him.

"Is Hopkins to be trusted?" he asked quickly.

"Absolutely. Hush, she is coming. Let us go into the dining-room."

It was a beautiful old room, heavily wainscoted, with carved panels and deep window-seats and soft hangings of peacock-blue velvet and rich, heavy silver plate. Mr. Ferguson, hearing the swish of soft silk coming nearer and nearer, felt himself grow white. A mist blurred his eyes. Like a drowning man clutching at a straw he caught with his eyes at the objects which he had previously seen and which now, such was his emotion, were mere blotches of color.

"Stage-fright," he murmured, and became aware that Mrs. Pultney-Greene was introducing him as the secretary she had engaged and who, through some misunderstanding of her instructions, had arrived ahead of time.

The mist cleared from his eyes and he saw that the woman he loved had grown alarmingly thin and pale since he had seen her that Midsummer Eve, a radiant vision of resplendent health. There was in her face an expression that baffled him. When he sought to analyze it, it occurred to him that it was a lack of expression, rather than singularity of expression, which challenged his attention. Doris's face looked as if a thin strata of wax had been drawn over her features, rendering them immobile and hard.

Again the horrid fear which he had not couched in words even to himself caught at his heartstrings.

Doris greeted him with cold indifference, without so much as glancing in his direction.

"How do you do, Mr. French; I did not know, Mrs. Pultney-Greene, that you had definitely decided to get a secretary."

The blood rushed to Matthew's face. Such was his nervousness the stored-up agony of the suspense he had been through, not for a few hours, but for days and weeks

and months, that, in an upheaval of feeling, an awful revulsion set in. Her cool diffidence made him furiously, blindly, unreasonably angry. He had wanted her to accept his incognito and not to question it, and because she had done precisely what he wanted her to do he lost his temper.

The very butler, he thought, had recognized him as a gentleman. And the woman he loved was so lacking in intuition, in discrimination, in heaven knows what, as to think him an underling.

It was a beautiful attack of nerves and it vented itself in a sudden break of anger.

"If I have come at an inopportune moment," he said, very ungraciously, "I suppose I can take myself off again."

He had thought her a snob a moment ago, but he realized in a flash how unjust had been his estimate of her when she looked at him with her glorious golden-brown eyes, the beauty of which was wholly unimpaired. A tremor of helplessness succeeded his foolish, unjust anger. He realized with distress that, because his emotions were to be called into constant play, his judgment easily might become warped.

"I am afraid," Doris said gravely, "I seemed deficient in courtesy, or in hospitality, or in both." Matthew noted that the little proud air with which she spoke was due to an adorable shyness. "You will believe me, I hope, when I assure you that I said what I did merely because I was surprised. I am very forgetful at times—since my trouble."

Mr. Ferguson mumbled something unintelligible. He himself could not have interpreted the words in plain language. At the same time Hopkins announced that dinner was served, and, having seated themselves, Matthew

noticed that Doris once more relapsed into aloof indifference.

Mrs. Pultney-Greene looked hard at Matthew, then at Doris.

"Doris, my dear, Mr. French is a cousin of Doctor Hart's. I consider we were very fortunate to obtain his services, as it is unusual for a young man of such promise to bury himself in such an out-of-the-way place, especially in winter."

Doris said:

"Mrs. Hart was very kind to me—very—at the time of my trouble." Then, as if struck by a new idea, she laid down her soup-spoon, and, with a very gentle, tender look in her eyes, asked:

"Perhaps you came here because of illness, Mr. French? Our climate, you know, has cured more than one very bad case."

Matthew Ferguson saw his advantage. His access of fury had cleared his head, discharging, as it were, the pent-up nervous tension which had harassed him so long. Swiftly, as he always mapped out his line of action, he decided to press his advantage to the uttermost, unscrupulously, if need be. He blessed his lean and gaunt appearance which enabled him to do so.

"Oh, I haven't tuberculosis—nothing contagious, you know," he said swiftly.

Doris flushed to the roots of her hair.

"Please do not think that I inquired if you were ill for reasons of selfish fear, Mr. Ferguson."

"Oh, no; of course not," said Matthew, studiously polite, in a tone which belied his words. Poor Doris's manner became more deeply apologetic.

"If you are not very well, Mr. French, I am sure that Mrs. Pultney-Greene can so arrange the matters she wishes you to attend to that you may be outdoors for

several hours each day, whether on business or pleasure."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Pultney-Greene, "in fact, I was about to propose that, for the first week or so, Mr. French be permitted to consider his time his own, so that he may gain a little flesh before putting his nose to the grindstone."

"An excellent plan. I heartily endorse it. Hopkins!"

"Yes, ma'am, thank you, ma'am," said the butler. Mr. Ferguson caught his eye and the old man grinned sheepishly.

"There is an unopened case of old port in the cellar," said Doris. "Oporto, vintage 1880—I think."

"If I may be so free as to venture an opinion, ma'am, it's 1881."

"Well, Hopkins, 1880 or 1881, please have James open the case and bring up a bottle at once."

"There is also a case of 1885, ma'am."

"Bring up the best, Hopkins; let us have the best."

"Yes, ma'am; certainly, ma'am, quality to quality, ma'am, if I may so venture to paraphrase 'sweets to the sweet.'"

"But which is the best, Hopkins?"

"Why, ma'am, the Late Lamented Three left both cases unopened, so that, no bottle being extracted therefrom or uncorked, any opinion I might venture to express, ma'am, would be unreliable, for, as the saying goes, 'the proof of the pudding is the eating.'"

A cloud passed over Doris's countenance at Hopkin's whimsical mention of her husband, and Matthew wondered at the latitude of speech allowed the old man. But as Hopkins finished speaking Doris leaned back in her chair and laughed. The laughter brought the color to her cheeks, brightened her eyes, seemed to burnish her entire person into something of her old resplendent loveliness.

Best of all, for one moment the wax mask into which her face seemed compressed melted away.

"May I venture to inquire, Hopkins," she inquired with gentle raillery, "whether you always sample the wine?"

Hopkins the immaculate was in no way offended. His young mistress's laughter seemed to please the old fellow prodigiously.

"The Late Lamented One, ma'am, always insisted upon my venturing upon an opinion, after sampling the first bottle of every new case."

"Well, we shall have to demand your opinion, also. Ask James to open both cases, and to bring up a bottle of each vintage. Mr. French can then tell us which he prefers."

Mr. Ferguson expressed his gratitude for this delicate attention, while Hopkins dispatched James for the two bottles. The wine being brought to the table and opened, Mr. Ferguson gravely sipped the ruby liquid first from one glass and then from the other, while the imperturbable Hopkins modestly helped himself to about a thimbleful from each bottle, tossing it down with the speediness of a prestidigitator.

"Well?" Doris inquired of Mr. Ferguson. Something of the light and serenity had vanished from her face. The wax mask was again in place.

Now it happened that Matthew Ferguson knew very little of wine. He had no taste for either tobacco or wine, and invariably drank the sherry or claret or sauterne that was set before him in much the same way as he disposed of the coffee or the tea, without thought as to whether the coffee was Mocha or Java or a blend, or the tea English breakfast or Ceylon. Upon any other occasion he would have been mortified to commit himself on so vital a matter of polite life, but it occurred to

him that this ignorance was admirably suited to his character of poor secretary.

"I feel," he said, with a little catch in his voice, for he had almost committed the irreparable break of addressing his employer-hostess by her first name, "as if you were wasting good wine on me. I know so little of the different marks that I can distinguish no difference in taste."

"I never can, either," said Doris, "but when I was not well I used to drink it nevertheless as a medicine, and so must you, Mr. French, for it will do you a world of good. Hopkins, we are waiting for your opinion."

Hopkins, with a rueful countenance, took from the sideboard first one empty glass and then another. Holding them up to the light, he observed:

"If I may be so free as to venture, ma'am, to say that, as several minutes have elapsed since my sampling took place, and seeing, moreover, that my samples were mere thimblefuls, I am happy to say, ma'am, as I have forgotten which was which."

"Your memory is not good, I am afraid, Hopkins."

"Thank you, ma'am, quite so. It never was good, as my teacher at the poor-'ouse where I was deprived of what little education I might have had always used to say on the occasion of my not being able to memorize the words of 'Home, Sweet Home.'"

Everybody burst out laughing at this felicitous choice of a poem for poor-house boys to memorize, and Doris said:

"Well, better try another sample, Hopkins. And use as a measure Number thirteen instead of Number six."

"I was ever a poor mathematician, ma'am, so if it is a trigonemtrical measure which you are instructing me to use——"

"I was speaking of thimbles, Hopkins," said Doris, "since you spoke of thimblefuls. Number six would fit

your little finger and number thirteen would fit your thumb. It's number thirteen I am requesting you to employ as a measure."

"To be sure, ma'am, thank you, ma'am, though, if I may be so free, it's the first time that I heard that a tailor employs his thumb for pushing the needle, though truth forces me to admit that once, in perusing a volume of travels by one Bayard Taylor, I did read of a chap, who, having lost the use of his hands, did employ his toes for painting a pictoor."

The beautiful irrelevancy of this illustration of a perverted use of human toes occasioned a new wave of merriment, in the wake of which Doris, the light dying out of her face together with the laughter, perfunctorily requested Hopkins to give his opinion of the wine.

"To be sure, ma'am." He poured himself a moderate quarter of a glass from each bottle, tasted each daintily, and shook his head lugubriously.

"Which is the better, Hopkins?"

"Glorious, both of them, ma'am; ah, ma'am, as the Late Lamented Three used to say, and his taste in wine and literature were equally good, with an especial taste for alliteration, ma'am, ' 'Opkins, my boy,' he used to say, ' 'Opkins, there's no combination on earth like Pliny and Port, unless it be Madeira and Milton, or, indeed, Cognac and Canaille.' "

"Canaille?" inquired Mr. Ferguson?

"Yes, sir, a Frenchman, sir, a writer-chap of the time of Raisin," Hopkins deferentially instructed Mr. Ferguson.

Mr. Ferguson smothered an astonished, "Corneille and Racine," but Hopkins heard.

"Just so, sir," he said, "Canaille and Raisin."

"But, Hopkins, which is the better?" Doris demanded once more.

"Don't mind me in the least, Hopkins," Matthew admonished him.

"Well, sir, if you will forgive me for being so free, I quite agree with you. There is no difference in the bouquet."

Whereupon, referring to the label, Hopkins discovered to everybody's amusement that "that Jeames," to whom he applied the epithet "perepperept," had brought up two bottles of the same vintage, and, apparently covered with shame and confusion, went from the room, doubtless to discipline the delinquent Jeames.

While Hopkins was out of the room Doris remarked that the old man had been in the service of the family for years, and that they all were much attached to him, and treated him as a friend. This accounted for the old man's garrulity.

A desultory conversation was kept up during the meal. Never had Matthew Ferguson worked so hard at small talk with such poor results. While he spoke he watched Doris closely and it seemed to him, who had made a study of human faces to the purpose of discovering what they concealed quite as much as what they revealed, not so much that her interest flagged as that, when her interest was at the highest, she forcibly tried to arrest or suppress it. She retired immediately after dinner.

Mrs. Pultney-Greene asked Mr. Ferguson to follow her upstairs to the office, and, having convinced herself that no one was stationed in the hall or the adjoining rooms, she began, speaking with an emotion which he did not find entirely comprehensible.

"Say nothing now. You have seen her at table with others. You have yet to see how she spends her evenings."

Her emotion was so great that her breath came in quick gasps.

"How can I?" Matthew inquired, filled with wonder. "She intimated that she desired to be alone."

Mrs. Pultney-Greene steadied herself against the large, flat library desk beside which the two were standing. Her hand trembled perceptibly and her stateliness seemed to take on a more imperial air as she answered his question.

"Unknown to her you are going to look through a hole in a curtain screening the French windows of her sitting-room from the balcony, which runs around the rotunda at the end of this corridor."

"Spy on the woman I love! Never!"

Mrs. Pultney-Greene was white as death.

"Yes, you will spy on her, because, once you know what an unearthly thing goes on in her room evening after evening, your love for her will make you understand that which you could never understand otherwise, and which you must know before you can cast about for ways and means of saving her from her enemies. They, I can tell you, have not hesitated to spy on her for their own ends."

"In Heaven's name, what do you mean?"

"I mean that shortly after the Chalmers came here for the first time after Lawrence's death, Hopkins, who sees and hears everything, pointed out to me a tiny slit in the curtain of the rotunda at the point indicated. It was a curious slit, running horizontally the length of a half-inch and connecting at right angles with two vertical slits of the same length. A flap was thus formed, which, when carefully lifted, was amply large to serve as a peep-hole. This flap had been carefully pasted down with silk which exactly matched the curtain, so that the slits were invisible to the passer-by, but, being thin and easily snapped, they offered no hindrance to a view of the room. Hopkins discovered them by chance on moving

the curtain to see whether a new housemaid had properly dusted the woodwork."

Mr. Ferguson was still rebellious.

"I dislike doing this thing," he said. "Surely, you can tell me just as well what you wish me to know."

"No; you must see for yourself." Mrs. Pultney-Greene bit her lip. "No description, be it ever so forceful, can produce the same impression." She broke off and controlled herself with a visible effort.

"I entreat you, Mr. Ferguson, do not argue with me, but do as I ask you. My powers of endurance are all but exhausted and now that I have found someone to help me bear my burden, I feel as if I cannot carry it alone another moment."

Mr. Ferguson took the trembling hand of Mrs. Pultney-Greene, who seemed to have aged ten years during her strange admonition, and laid it on the strong, firm palm of his left hand. With his right hand he covered it with a gesture of protection.

"Dear lady, I will do as you ask."

Since he had acquiesced in her demand he did not understand why her agitation continued, and even, so it seemed to him, increased. He felt her hand clutch at his convulsively, nervously, then she spoke jerkily.

"I have one or two things to tell you before you go. Once, shortly after they were married, Lawrence Diberto had a slight accident happen to his eye, which sent him to New York to a specialist, who kept him in a dark room for twenty-four hours. Doris was unable to accompany him as her mother was very ill. Her husband, sitting in darkness, was unable to write her and therefore dictated a letter to her, not to a stenographer, but into a graphophone. Doris has kept that record. You are about to learn what use she makes of it and a life-size picture of

her husband's, which she had removed from the rotunda to her own room shortly after his death."

Mr. Ferguson's distaste for the task before him increased. He was prey to a strange medley of emotions, and stronger than the jealousy which he could not wholly quell, and of which he was thoroughly ashamed, was a feeling of delicacy which whispered to him that he was about to commit a monstrous outrage upon the woman he loved. But he had pledged his word, and his natural shrewdness counseled him to learn all there was to learn in this remarkable case.

Subduing his repugnance to eavesdropping he allowed himself to be led to the place in the rotunda which commanded a view of Doris's sitting-room. Mrs. Pultney-Greene pointed out the flap in the curtain, and, moving it gently, he saw that through this small aperture he was indeed in a position to see all that was passing in the room. One small pane of glass was missing from the French windows, as his alert eye saw at a glance, and, bending down, he saw that it had been cut away with a diamond-pointed glass-cutter, and had not been broken out of its frame, as he had assumed at first. He withdrew hastily behind the curtain as he thought that he heard a movement in the room beyond, which was immersed in semi-darkness, but the sound he had heard came from the other side of the house. He did not know at what to marvel most; the daring hardihood of Colonel Chalmers in mutilating, not merely the curtain, but the very doors that led to his niece's private rooms, or the self-concentration of Doris, which had prevented her noticing this inroad upon her privacy, for it was inconceivable that, had she become aware of it, she would not have sought to discover the intruder. The circumstance spoke volumes and resurrected the fear which he had scourged into the background of his thoughts whenever

it presented itself, and which, as yet, he had not couched in words. He was intensely afraid, and his fear was not for himself.

He stood erect, leaning his hand upon the banister of the rotunda. His heart was beating wildly and there was an odd buzzing in his ears. The thought came to him that if he were to speak now it would be in a cracked and husky voice. When, in touching the flap at last, his fingers encountered each other, he became aware that they were cold as ice.

With sudden resolution he lifted the flap, which was at a convenient height from the ground, and applied his eye; and, once he had become accustomed to the comparative darkness of the apartment into which he looked, he saw that the dim light was obtained by the use of many candles of medium size, which, held by some score of candelabra, were scattered about the large room in such a way as to secure a uniform light. The impression of ceremoniousness which is always produced by candles received a tragic import by the fact that the entire huge apartment was draped in black—as if a funeral were in progress.

But at no funeral, no matter how exalted the personage who is the central figure of the obsequies, is there such a total absence of color as had been achieved in this room with a cunning that savored of fanaticism. The walls were swathed in black cloth and some black stuff, denim or a rug, he could not distinguish which, covered the entire floor. The very woodwork was painted black. Mantelpiece and table had been treated likewise. Every imaginable piece of furniture in the room, chairs and a small raised dais at one side of the room, had been bereft of personality by the leveling hue of mourning. Only the candles, which were white, and the candelabra, which were of massive silver, were not black.

Beads of perspiration stood on Mr. Ferguson's brow. The fear which hitherto he had succeeded in silencing became so insistent that he felt ill and unnerved. He was about to withdraw his eye from the aperture, when the door of an adjoining room opened, and Doris entered, with a face as white as the candles. She walked slowly through the large apartment and, like them and the candelabra which held them, her face was the sole dissenting hue in this desert of black.

Following her movements, Mr. Ferguson saw that she opened the drawer of some article of furniture, the character of which he could not distinguish, for, being a black object upon a black background, it afforded no clew as to outline, and from this she took two very tall candles, fully as tall as the altar candles used by the Catholic Church, and these she placed in single candlesticks which stood upon the small dais which Matthew Ferguson had noticed before. Candlestick and candle together were almost as tall as Doris, and having lighted these, she leaned forward, and with her left hand pulled open what was apparently the door of some cabinet sunk into the wall, while, with her right hand, she pulled out a corresponding door on the opposite side. There was no doubt in Matthew Ferguson's mind that behind those doors of sepulchral black, right and left, as if they guarded a holy of holies—something too sacred for any but the most secret rites—was hidden from vulgar eyes the picture of Lawrence Diberto.

Witnessing all this in the terrible stillness of a country night in midwinter, the thing seemed little short of ghoulish, and yet, compared with what was to come, it was as nothing.

Pulling forth a box, Doris opened it, and Matthew saw her twist a handle. She was winding a graphophone, and with a sudden sinking feeling he realized that the woman

he loved was about to abandon herself to the morbid ecstasy of listening to a voice long since hushed by death, but preserved for her, in perpetuity, by the freak of destiny which had made her husband blind for a day.

Matthew Ferguson desired of all things to move away from the spot without hearing or seeing more. He realized what his suffering must be if he condemned himself to remain and listen to the words which Doris's lover-husband had addressed to her before their honeymoon was over. But his muscles seemed paralyzed; it seemed to him that if he only tried hard enough there was no reason why he might not walk away without hearing more, but he found that, try as hard as he would, he did not possess the power to move from the spot. And while he was debating with himself the metallic voice of the graphophone began to speak, and he saw Doris, who was now kneeling on the dais before the picture, a lighted candle at either side, bow her head as if in prayer.

The voice of the dead man, recorded by the graphophone, began to speak. It was a strange voice, beautiful in spite of the metallic distortion to which the instrument subjected it, and it abrased the consonants, robbing them of their sharpness and harshness. The voice chanted rather than spoke its liturgy of love:

> "My love, all through the lavender-scented night my sleep has been sweetly troubled with dreams of thee.
>
> "All through the delicately scented night the air was alive with your presence, and eloquent of your being. All the world, my love, was pregnant with thee. For my heart is a phial holding one perfume only; my mind is a chalice filled with one essence; my soul is a flower containing one fragrance. And that perfume that informs me, that fragrance that

ravishes me, that essence that glorifies me, my love, art thou.

"A white moth brushed against my face and I awoke, for I thought that thy fingers were caressing my cheek.

"The night wind soughed in the trees without, and I started, for I thought it was thy voice whispering words of love.

"A miller whirled through my room, and I trembled, for I thought, sweet love, that I held thee in my arms.

"My love—my love—then I slept no more, but to contemplation of thee and thy many perfections I consecrated the night—the mysterious night that had pursued my sleep, the wonderful night that had tormented my dreams, the beautiful night that had throbbed and pulsed with your presence.

"Who shall say how beautiful thou art, my love—how perfect thy excellence?

"Thy hair is like unto the rays of the sun, softened and made supple and spun into silken threads, honey-colored;* about thy skin is a veil of amber dust, mellowed in flames of rose leaves and sulphur; thy voice is as the night wind stirring among leaves of gold muffled with wine-colored velvet; but for the making of thy eyes were combined all the glories; for the making of thy eyes were taken the splendor of the sun, the sweetness of honey, the shimmer of amber, the softness of rose leaves, the flickering of the sulphur flame, sifted through a web of gold. Thy beauty is so fine that words cannot describe it; all words—even the sweetest—when exalting thee are as coarse clay images compared to statues of gold and Parian marble. One thing only have I perceived in all the world before which the

beauty of thy body fades, and the radiance of thy eyes is dimmed, and that, my love, is thy soul.

"Thy face is as the visage of an angel seen in fancy by the blind, who, perceiving the manifold beauties of the world—the graciousness of music, the smoothness of the pearl, the aroma of the rose—are thereby stimulated into a belief in the illimitable beauties sensed by the eye.

"As we fancy the tone of an organ to be, before we have heard it, so is thy voice; before we have heard it, when in childhood or adolescence we have read of it in the yellow page of some precious old tome; or have dreamed of it, standing among the mouldering ruins of some ivy-clad cloister, where its voice, once jubilant and triumphant, lies dead among the shadows of the past. As the deaf, in their dreams, construe the sound of a flute's voice wedded to the voice of a harp, so is thy voice.

"When I see a homely woman, I am filled with profound compassion that, treading the same earth with thee, she should be the bearer of such pitiable inadequacy.

"When I see a comely woman, I have it in my heart to laugh with mockery, for the most favored one is as a dust-heap by the side of thy radiance.

"If the rainbow could be interpreted by music, and the song of the brook be sculptured in marble, then could words express your loveliness, your peerless, flawless, supreme, unapproachable loveliness.

"My heart and my reason have sat in judgment upon my passion, and, judging it, have approved it; ay, more, have bowed down before it as before a flame kindled by themselves, yet transcending them.

"My love, my love—as all the world worships the gold-drenched, tumultuous day, with its pleasures, its

labors, its sins and its miseries, and its glory, which is composed of all these and is unending, so do I worship thee, idealize thee, adore thee. Nay, not thus, but more, immeasurably more."

When the love-song had been completed, Doris lay prostrate across the small dais, the contours of her slim, black-clad figure melting into the gloom of the platform. Her blond hair, upon which the huge altar-candles shed an unsteady light, glinted golden, and seemed akin to the unstable flame.

It was the most uncanny thing Matthew had ever witnessed. Shaken to the very depths of his being, his knees grew weak; his brow was damp and clammy, and his fingers were cold as icicles. He groped his way along the banister which enclosed the rotunda and thence into the office. So haggard was his appearance that Mrs. Pultney-Greene started up in alarm.

Matthew threw himself into a chair.

"Could you not have spared me that ordeal?" he asked. And now he sprang to his feet, and was shaking from head to foot, not with a chill or fright, but with passion. It surged through him like a tempest, and all the self-repression, all the evasion of the great tide of primitive feeling which he had successfully practiced, crumbled away. In the trail of passion, lashing furiously, came jealousy, and that this jealousy was largely if not wholly spiritual made it no less distressing. He rocked to and fro in a spasm of pain. Words and phrases from the love-letter of Lawrence Diberto, cruel because of their sheer beauty, racked and tore at him because of his impotence as a coiner of phrases. Not in a thousand years, though he apprenticed himself to the entire hierarchy of poets, could he produce a love-song such as that of the dead man. Never would he have thought of comparing

her hair to honey, nor would he have thought of the phrase about the rainbow or the brook. A mere pigmy her husband might have been as regarded substantial attainments, but what had he, Matthew Ferguson, though he had conquered New York in three years, to offer her as compared with the accomplishments of Lawrence Diberto?

He had not been able to obtain a glimpse of the portrait of Doris's lover-husband, because of the angle at which he viewed the scene, and this circumstance added fuel to the flame of his torment. He longed for proof of some sort to convince himself that he, Matthew Ferguson, was indeed the better man. Would his portrait have furnished that proof? Perhaps not. Lawrence Diberto had been described to him by more than one person as a singularly beautiful man, and poor Matthew fairly writhed with pain because of his own uncompromising plainness of feature.

He thought, too, of the volume of Shelley, lying open upon the *prie Dieu* of turquoise blue velvet, sprinkled with little silver stars. His agony rose to such a pitch that he had the sensation of going mad. And in the wake of this terrifying spiritual jealousy came a jealousy, material and unlovely, and even while he shook in the grasp of this unbeautiful feeling he felt bitter shame for harboring it.

Dizzy and ill he felt, and suddenly he became aware that Hopkins was holding something to his lips and that, a few minutes later, the cloud cleared from his brain and he was able to think clearly once more. Hopkins withdrew as silently as he had come.

Mrs. Pultney-Greene was regarding him gravely.

"I think you are in no condition to-night to discuss matters," she said.

He replied quickly:

"Whatever is to be said must be said now. I want you to tell me everything you know as quickly as possible."

"Before I begin—what is your impression?"

"She is not mad—if you mean that!"

"You feel absolutely certain on that point?"

"Unequivocally. She is not mad now, but I believe also that she is on a fair road to lunacy unless this is stopped."

Mrs. Pultney-Greene went very white.

"You feel certain that if she is allowed to continue these—midnight rites—she is bound to lose her reason?"

"Does it seem otherwise to you?"

Mrs. Pultney-Greene shivered.

"If you, who love her, think this, you will be able to realize what a baneful construction is put upon her conduct by her enemies."

"Yes, I see that very plainly." Matthew rose and began pacing the room. "Look here," he cried, with passion, "we must stop it!"

"How? Have you the courage to go and tell her you played eaves-dropper? I tell you candidly, I lack the courage to do so, though I have known her since childhood. Doris is the soul of generosity and courtesy, and her humblest dependent is never allowed to feel that he is other than a friend with a claim on her kindness and consideration. But, for all that, she is the most reserved person I have ever met. Much as she adored her husband, deeply as she loves her mother, there have been times when she gave the impression with both of being wholly detached. She keeps a little holy of holies in her heart into which none may enter, and I have not the courage to force my way in."

"Does her mother know of this? Can we not appeal

to her? Even if Doris were to resent the interference of her mother, she would have to bear with it."

"Her mother!" Mrs. Pultney-Greene ejaculated, with ineffable contempt. "Her mother, indeed!" she repeated, scornfully.

"Does her mother know, I ask?"

"She knows."

"Who told her?

"Colonel Chalmers."

"Colonel Chalmers!" Matthew exclaimed in surprise. "Ah! The man must be a consummate villain, indeed, and very sure of himself, if he dared tell her mother."

"He dared tell her mother because he knew her mother."

"I beg of you, Mrs. Pultney-Greene, be plain and explicit."

Mrs. Pultney-Greene unlocked a drawer of the desk at which she was sitting, and, handing Matthew a letter, she bade him read it, saying that it would explain itself.

The letter was addressed to Mrs. Pultney-Greene and, glancing at the signature, Matthew saw that it had been written by Letitia Parsons, whom he guessed was Doris's mother. Even in the turmoil of spirit in which he was plunged his heart cried out with gratitude that Doris had not inherited her name from her mother. So odious was his recollection of the older woman, he felt almost thankful that Doris no longer had in common as much as the family name with that mother of hers. It softened him toward Lawrence Diberto. Was there good, after all, for him in the previous marriage of the woman he loved? It came to him for the first time that, inscrutably, the entire trend of events might be for the best, meaning *his* best. And, in his tacit, naïve acceptance that all occurrences, episodes and events were revolving about himself as a nucleus, and that his own happiness was the

ultimate goal of the current history of the human beings in whom he was interested, Matthew Ferguson evinced that superb adaptiveness which is the crowning requisite of the man whom nothing will down, who surmounts all obstacles, transmuting what would be poison to other men to some beneficent potion, capable of adding luster to the glory of his victory.

He unfolded the letter and read it.

"My Dear Mrs. Pultney-Greene:

"Yours received and am glad to hear both you and Doris are well. At least so you say. But the Colonel seems to think something is amiss with Doris. Poor dear man, he does worry so about her. Though I write him—and I am her mother and he is not—that it is very foolish of him to worry about her. If she chooses to carry on every night in her own rooms, reading her silly graphophone letter over and over, why, it is her own business, and everybody who knows Doris knows that she would be likely to plump herself down on her knees, in a spooky room, and nothing but candles burning as if she couldn't afford gas or electric lights, while she is reading it. I know my Doris. The Colonel says she will go crazy if she keeps on like that, and I write back she is crazy now, and if she were not a rich woman it would be good for her. I never could do anything with Doris even as a little girl, she would take things to her heart so dreadfully, as you know.

"Well, all I can say is I am convinced Doris is crazy now, and as to coming home to look after her, as the Colonel suggests, I thank him very much, but here I stay. I am a sick woman and my heart is worse than usual. And if I came to Diberto Hall I would only go crazy too, and not make Doris ra-

tional again. And besides, my dear friend, I do so suspect that old rascal of wanting me back there for his own sake. You know what I mean. He is so fond of me, poor dear, and if it were not for my poor heart, which certainly could not stand the excitement of getting married again, I believe I would hitch up once more to the matrimonial cart, for I do admire him very much. And Doris could say what she liked. She, of course, will never marry again. Well, as I said before, if it gives her pleasure to make herself unhappy, and to end in a lunatic asylum, I cannot help it or her, and a great solace it is, my friend, to think I will not be there to see it, for my poor heart will not keep going much longer.

"The doctor here says it is my stomach and not my heart, which I consider a piece of unparalleled impudence, and I told him so. I told him it was my heart that bothered me, and I wanted him to cure it and not attack other perfectly healthy organs. Besides, it is so unrefined to have something the matter with one's stomach. The mere mention of the horrid thing is an offense. He insisted he knew, and I got rid of him.

"This is a long letter. I do not want you to think I am in low spirits. I am having a grand time. The gentlemen are attentive—the young ones because I am old, and the old ones because they like me, and I am candid in saying that so long as I have a man or two dancing attendance on me I can never be quite unhappy. And one gentleman, a retired naval officer, is very nice to me, and, in the moonlight, alone with him, I feel quite young, though whether it is he or the moonlight I cannot say.

"I will close. I expect to pay Doris a visit next March or April, but not for long. For she does make

me crazy with her mourning weeds and long face, and besides, if the Colonel is there, I am afraid, if I stay a long time he will undermine—I almost said my virtue—but I mean my resolution.

"Affectionately,

"Letitia Parsons."

The liquid flow of unsophisticated language, and the artless portrayal of whatever feeling happened to be uppermost in the writer's mind, made Matthew grit his teeth savagely, as he said:

"Colonel Chalmers is very deep. Of course, with a letter from Doris's mother in his possession, attesting her daughter's lunacy, and with the incontestable facts themselves to uphold him, and the taut, drawn distorted look in Doris's poor face, he would have very little trouble in having her committed, especially if he secured a clever lawyer to engineer things for him. Just how sick is Mrs. Parsons?"

"She is really a very ill woman. Likely to pass away at any moment."

"That's just what the old scoundrel is waiting for, then. Good Lord! What a rogue! Do you know if he has seen any lawyer in this neighborhood?"

"I do not know."

"No," Matthew mused aloud, "he would be careful to cover up his trail, shrewd old fox that he is." He went to the window and began drumming against the panes. The snow was still falling steadily, stealthily, with a silence and a steadfastness that seemed part and parcel of the sinister conspiracy which was in progress against the mistress of Diberto Hall. Suddenly Matthew's face became resolute. He came back to the desk and his voice vibrated with emotion.

"I am not a man to shrink from a task because it is

difficult. And I love Doris Diberto, believe me, with a depth and an earnestness which I lack words to describe. I am not a fatalist, yet I believe that Doris, in the scheme of things, was meant for me. If I must fight hard for her, so much the better. I am fully aware that all men are prone to undervalue that which they win too easily, be it gold, or position, or a woman's love. Win Doris's love I will, and as things stand now it seems to me that to win it is the speediest and easiest, perhaps the only possible, solution of this strange affair. Do not be surprised, I beg of you, at anything I do or say. Do not interfere. I am going to play shamelessly upon her pity for my weak lungs."

He laughed.

"Tell me," he continued, "Doris looks to me as if she kept indoors a good deal. Does she?"

Mrs. Pultney-Greene nodded assent.

"Sometimes she does not leave the house for a fortnight."

"To-morrow morning," said Matthew quietly, "she is going to take a walk with me."

"You do not know Doris!"

"You do not know me!" He laughed, a little nervously this time. "There were some documents," he reminded Mrs. Pultney-Greene, "which you wanted to show me."

She placed an appalling pile of papers before him and, opening a small pocket ledger, indicated certain entries.

"These rents have not been paid for over six months," she said.

Matthew frowned.

"Is poverty prevalent in these parts?"

"The tenants are all earning good wages," Mrs. Pultney-Greene said, speaking with hesitation. "They are well-paid union men."

"Then why?"

"Doris will not bother to send a collector for the rents."

"And aren't the men honest enough to pay without being dunned?"

"They are hardly to blame. They work in the village, and it is impossible for them to come to the Hall except on Sundays. Formerly a real estate agent attended to this, and turned the rents over to the estate in bulk."

"Worse and worse," said Matthew with a frown. "Why did Doris discard the services of this man?"

"He could do no business in these parts and went to New York. I begged her to get someone else to attend to these rents for her, but she refused."

"What reason did she give for refusing?"

"She considered it 'sordid' to allow mercenary matters to impinge on her grief."

"Hm." Matthew looked very grave.

"Has the Colonel any notion of this?" he asked, quickly.

"Undoubtedly. There has been much talk in the village about it, as well as about the general laxness of our business methods, resulting always, you must understand, to our own detriment."

"This is bad, this is very bad, indeed," said Matthew Ferguson. "Love for money is so widespread and so strong a sentiment that, although an acquired passion, it may be said to be the third great mainspring of humanity—hunger and love, of course, being the primitive ones. Such indifference to money, without the pretext of charity to excuse it, would be considered evidence of a disordered mind quite as damning to the average intellect as those unearthly, secret, midnight rites of hers. You spoke of 'general laxness.' What else is there?"

Mrs. Pultney-Greene pointed to the huge pile of papers before him.

"We will go through them to-morrow," she said, "I am too fatigued to-night to do any more."

Matthew sprang to his feet as she rose and courteously went with her to the door. Late into the night he sat over that ominous pile of documents, his dismay growing apace as he realized into what hideous disarray all matters pertaining to the estate had been allowed to lapse immediately after Lawrence Diberto's death. The loss in round figures, within a brief half year, he roughly estimated at over a hundred thousand dollars.

It was long after midnight, when, pushing himself away from the desk, he rose and went to the window. As Colonel Chalmers, under the will of Lawrence Diberto, was legatee in case of Doris's decease, every court of equity would hold him justified in restraining Doris from making ducks and drakes of the estate through such signal shiftlessness as had accompanied her régime, and there was hardly a doubt that, when all facts were made known, a charge of lunacy would be upheld. Colonel Chalmers's position was even stronger than he had at first supposed.

He went to his room and undressed. It had stopped snowing and the light wind of the early evening had blown itself into a wild gale, lashing madly about the house with sounds as tempestuous as those of waves splashing upon stone. Near his window stood a maple, the leafless branches of which were so close to the house that, as the wind-storm reached its height, they whipped and rubbed and crunched against the window with strange, hollow, eerie sounds that brought to mind fantastic childhood tales of witches and spooks.

Matthew Ferguson, steeped in a fever of misery, tossed restlessly in his bed. Visions of Doris floated gossamer-like across his consciousness, and the crunching, reverberating sound of the maple-branches seemed to echo the

words of the love-letter of poor Lawrence Diberto. At half past three his raw nerves rebelled against further torment. He arose, wrapped himself in his eiderdown dressing-robe, and went to the office, where he remembered having seen a Morris chair. The noises of that wind-tossed night were a little less eerie here, and shortly after hearing the hall clock strike four he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER X

*Mr. Ferguson Gets to Work—in His Own Sweet Way—and Has Reason to Compliment Himself upon His Progress*

The nervous tension of the afternoon and evening, followed by a sleepless night, did not tend to make Mr. Ferguson appear less gaunt and lean when he appeared at the breakfast table the next morning. The greenish-gray pallor of his face marked him as a peculiarly fitting object upon which a tender-hearted woman might expend her compassion, and, to heighten the effect of downright indisposition, he had refrained from shaving before breakfast, knowing that the impalpable shadows cast by one night's imperceptible growth of stubble are mistaken, by ninety-nine women out of a hundred, for "poor color."

Doris was not the hundredth woman. She questioned him solicitously, when, after breakfast, they found themselves alone in the room.

"You look as if you had not slept very well, Mr. French."

"I slept miserably," he replied, petulantly, with the air of an injured youngster, and looking at her with pleading, humid eyes that seemed to beg permission to lay his aching head against her knee for solace and comfort.

Doris was not insensible to this appeal, and the little

comedy, of which she was utterly unconscious, throve accordingly.

"What room did you have?" she asked quickly.

"The room next to the office," he replied sulkily.

"They had no right to give you that room," she said, almost vindictively. "The maple needs trimming down to make that room habitable."

"I quite agree with you," he acquiesced sourly.

"I'll see that you get a different room to-night," she said. "You must be comfortable. Really, you must," she added more emphatically, as Matthew did not brighten at her first statement declaring that his comfort was imperative.

"Don't you think," she continued, gently, "that a half hour outdoors will do you a world of good?"

"Doesn't look very inviting, does it?" he growled.

"Oh, I think it does," she assured him cheerfully. She walked to the window and he followed her meekly.

"See," she said, in the tone in which a woman speaks who is intent on cheering a captious child, "see, how lovely the landscape is. The trees and shrubs are bewitchingly beautiful in their ermine robes. It is not bad under foot, either, because the sun has not had a chance to thaw the snow."

She looked at him, smiling the divine smile which good women reserve for those who are ill or unhappy, and he smiled back sourly.

"Perhaps," she continued, with inexhaustible patience, "you would prefer a spin in the automobile. Shall I order it for you?"

Mr. Ferguson judged it was time to show signs of relenting.

"It's very kind of you," he said, not too ungraciously, "but I think it is better for me to walk. Would you—do you—don't you——" his hesitation was not wholly

assumed, "don't you think a little stroll would do you a world of good, also?"

As he had divined she would, she froze instantly.

"I rarely go out, except when unavoidable," she said.

Matthew Ferguson blessed the flush that overspread his features and helped him in the rôle he was playing.

"I beg your pardon," he said, making a great show of being wounded to the quick. "I had no right to ask that of you." He spoke with great bitterness. "I hope you will forgive me. Your kindness to me has been such that for a moment I forgot myself—forgot, I mean, that I am not a guest at a country house, with you as my hostess, but that I am here as a salaried employee, your salaried employee."

He made her a humble bow and, turning, made a movement as if to leave the room.

"Mr. French!"

He turned where he stood in the middle of the large apartment, looking very masculine and masterful and exceedingly haughty.

"Mr. French!"

Doris advanced a step. Her face, now usually so white, was crimson. She spoke with nervous gentleness.

"I am sorry, indeed, that you took my statement of a plain fact to be a wanton affront."

Mr. Ferguson maintained a stony silence.

Doris's agitation increased. Her color wavered to and fro, streaking her face as with bands of rouge. His heart smote him for using her thus ungently. But it was for her ultimate good and he set his teeth grimly.

Doris's perturbation was painful to see. Her voice came huskily.

"I beg you to believe that in declining your invitation to walk I was actuated by no other motive than that I do not walk for pleasure. Not for one moment

did I give a thought to the fact that you are not here as—let us say—a week-end guest. I earnestly desire to make your stay here comfortable and happy."

"I must, of course, accept your word," he said with magnificent insolence.

At that she flared up.

"If you choose to consider me a snob, I cannot help it," she said with tumultuous indignation. "But you have no right and no reason to doubt my word."

"Mrs. Diberto!" He was all contrition now, pliable softness, yielding, soothing entreaty. This capacity of his to make an instantaneous change from one mood to another, from keenest satire to soft-spoken humaneness, was one of his deadliest weapons; was the weapon which, in the court-room, his opponents had learned most to dread. He spoke with a fluency and gentle insistence before which her anger crumbled away.

"It is for me to apologize, not for you. I owe you not one, but an hundred apologies, and I tender them freely. You have treated me with such superlative kindness that I would be a churl indeed if I were not keenly sensible of it. There is nothing of the snob about you. You are a divinely good and kind-hearted woman, and I am perfectly sincere in repeating that I did forget myself and my position here when I invited you to walk with me."

She was about to utter a protest, but he continued, overriding her with a gentle but gathering forcefulness.

"In saying that I do not reflect upon you—not in the least. Even in house-parties—I pay you the compliment of being utterly sincere—it is an arduous task for the hostess to be forced to play hostess all the time, and to see to the entertainment of the difficult guests herself. You are under no such obligations to me, who am to be a permanent member of your household. You are

under no obligation whatever to me, except such as your fine sense of honor imposes upon you. I am afraid that I was singularly unmannerly before in the choice of words in which I voiced my first apology, and I beg of you, with all my heart, not to condemn me utterly for my breach of the social amenities."

She held out her hand to him with charming impulsiveness. He took it, bowed over it elaborately and with a gesture of fine courtesy which few men could have bettered, and then relinquished it with the air of a courtier. He had the satisfaction of seeing that she tingled and thrilled with the subtle pleasure which punctiliousness in men invariably arouses in women. Thoroughbred that she was, she, least of all, was immune to the deliciously subtle homage of this competent masculine creature, who, in rendering his tribute to her womanly goodness, ensconced her safely in the clouds before bending his knee before her.

When he spoke again, he had changed his keynote.

He spoke as in a seeming burst of confidence which would not be repressed.

"I was born and bred in the country. For three years I have been mewed up in New York, and I did not anticipate the curious sensation that a return to rural life would induce in me. The thought of going forth alone fills me with a sense of haunting loneliness. Of course, it is ridiculous for a grown man to have such feelings, but such is the case."

He looked steadily at her as he spoke, and concluded by training upon her the deadly fire of his bewitching, fascinating smile. She met his gaze, and in all innocence looked as deeply into his eyes as he into hers. He became aware that his love for her was creeping into his eyes, and he wondered whether she would guess the

meaning of the softness in his glance. Suddenly her eyes fell before his.

"If you will get your coat on, I will be ready to walk with you in about ten minutes," she said, speaking very gently.

Every day after that first spirited encounter, she walked with him. Sometimes, however, she refused to accompany him. He saw with delight the struggle which she, consciously or unconsciously, was making against his masterful personality.

One day she conquered—or thought she did. Matthew sallied forth alone that morning on his constitutional, returning in less than a quarter of an hour. He was careful to speak loudly in the hall to a passing servant, so that Doris might be apprized of his return. He contrived to have her discover him, sitting near the log fire in the library, an open book face down on the floor beside him. He was the picture of wistful and listless forlornness. He saw an adorable look of tender pity come into her eyes. She spoke to him, and, when he answered in monosyllables, putting an evident exertion into even those brief replies, she sat down in a chair near him, and, with infinite tact and patience, set herself the task of entertaining him. It was a reversal of conditions as they had existed on the evening of his arrival, and he noted with gratification the substantial progress he had made in her esteem in the few days that had elapsed since then. He pretended a merely perfunctory interest in what she said; forced himself, apparently, to listen to her, gradually allowing her to win him from his moody indifference into which, however, he relapsed at judicious intervals. The next morning Doris walked with him as a matter of course.

On the tenth day of his stay at the Hall—the day preceding the announced return of the Chalmers—the singu-

lar relationship which had sprung up between them was destined to ripen into sudden and profound intimacy.

It was a sunny day with a chill wind from the north blowing in fitful gusts, but, in spite of this north wind, spring palpitated and throbbed in air and bud and blossom. The smell of the earth, soaked through and through with snow-water, its moisture being slowly absorbed by the warm sun, was enchanting to those who love the unique fragrance of the fecund earth.

Mr. Ferguson, standing on the steps of the porch, literally drank in the sweet spring odors.

"Isn't it intoxicating?" he asked, masking his ravishment because he was walking abroad with her on a morning so instinct and restless with new life under guise of delight in the earth-smell.

"Yes," she replied. It seemed to him that the wax mask was more evident than it had been for days. Her face looked constrained and harsh, and she seemed to resist the softening and beautifying aspect of nature. Her face hardened perceptibly as she looked out over the enormous sweep of lawn, edged with barberry and box, which, over night, had become shrouded, as by magic, in a penumbra of faintest green.

In silence they walked down the steps and followed a winding path leading away from the Hall through a woodland which led, as Matthew believed but did not certainly know, to Diberto Pool.

Suddenly she glanced up at him.

"You are not wearing your neck-scarf," she said. "The air is very sharp. Do you think it wise?"

"I have it on," he replied, jerking it up a little. "The air won't hurt me."

She stood still.

"You had better pull it up all the way," she commanded.

He fumbled at it clumsily.

"It is not yet crossed," she commented.

"I cannot put it on right without a mirror," he said crossly.

"Let me help you."

She signified that he was to unbutton his coat, and then, with deft fingers, she arranged his muffler. One of her fingers grazed his, he felt her breath upon his cheek, and the effort he was forced to make to restrain the very natural emotions which were engendered by the proximity of the sweet, gracious woman he loved sent the blood from his face.

"How very white you are this morning," she said. "And I had hoped you were much better for the nice walks on which I have taken you every morning."

Her gentle raillery had, for the moment, dissipated the constrained expression of her face. It occurred to him that she was hiding under that raillery an emotion similar to his own. He told himself that this was nonsense.

"I am much better, thank you. Curiously enough, I was thinking that the walks on which I had taken you were bringing back the color to your cheeks."

She looked frightened—he could not guess why—and her words came abruptly, after they had walked a few steps.

"The Chalmers, whom you have heard us mention, return to-morrow. After to-morrow you will have to walk alone, unless, indeed, my cousin Amy or the Colonel will bear you company."

"And what have the Chalmers to do with our walks?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. Their coming has nothing to do with them. I am merely pressing the occasion into use. After to-morrow, I walk no more."

"Surely, you do not mean that you do not intend to

stir out of the house now the beautiful spring weather is coming?"

"All weather is beautiful." Closing her eyes, with a gesture that was characteristic of her when deeply moved, she threw back her head, disclosing the exquisitely chiseled column of white throat rising out of her black furs, which she wore open. There was about her, at the moment, something of the Pagan's pantheistic love of nature, which all her constraint and self-repression could not mask. In a twinkling there was revealed to him what he believed was the truth. She was combating every normal desire toward life and happiness for some reason known only to herself. But why? He meant to know before the day was spent. Watching her, he saw her with an heroic effort set her features to their previous pattern of rigid immobility.

"I agree with you," said Matthew Ferguson. "I love the rain with its atmosphere of pathos, and the fog with its halo of mystery, and the snow with its lure of beauty, quite as much as I love the sunshine which promises nothing but spells fulfillment of the heathen sense of contentment in mere existence."

"I never would have suspected you capable of saying as pretty a thing as that," said she.

"Now I wonder—is that a compliment, or isn't it?"

For a moment she became gay. She laughed. But she did not answer, contenting herself with looking at him almost mischievously. Then the light faded from her face and her eyes.

"You have not yet told me why you intend to shut yourself away from the rain and the wind and the sunshine, which you admit that you love," he reminded her.

A strange change came over Doris's features. Not grief or sorrow, but a curious, melancholy exaltation was expressed in them.

"I am going to shut myself up away from rain and wind and sunshine, rainbow and hoarfrost and dew, croaking frog and cawing crow and whizzing locust because one who loved all these a hundred times more than you or I lies still and cold in six feet of earth."

Matthew felt his heart leap in his bosom. Here was a victory for him indeed. Often, in their solitary walks, had she alluded to her husband, but her references had been of a casual and desultory nature. Never before had she spoken of him with any depth of feeling, observing a nicety of reticence toward him who was a stranger which he, though it was directed against himself, thought in perfect keeping with her breeding and character. He was not slow to avail himself of the opening she now afforded him.

"Surely, you do not mean that for the rest of your days you will cut yourself off from everything that makes life beautiful and desirable?"

"Yes, that is what I mean to do," she replied with the curtness of fanaticism.

He forced himself to speak quietly.

"The morning walks have done you good, haven't they?"

"I do not consider myself."

"Then you have taken the air only out of kindness for me?"

"You seemed so miserable," she replied evasively.

He persisted.

"But they did you a world of good?"

She frowned a little angrily, and spoke shortly.

"I do not desire to derive good from anything."

He had studied her closely and knew her every expression by this time. He saw now that she was nervous and that she dreaded his quiet manner of extracting from her what he wanted to know. He was fully aware

that he must inevitably arouse either her acute anger, or her indignation, or both, by his next question.

"Our morning walks helped you to forget your sorrow for a little while, didn't they?"

She turned and looked at him, and he saw how intensely she chafed under the insinuation. In disdain and scorn, rather than in anger, she burst out, impetuously.

"Is that your idea of love—to try to forget the dead? I had thought better of you than that." She laughed derisively, and the scorn and contempt with which she viewed him made her doubly, trebly lovely. "Try to forget! Try to forget! I do not want to forget. I want to remember. I despise those who try to steep themselves in pleasures, distractions, and relaxations, in order to save their precious selves the bitterness of suffering and grief."

The intensity of her passion increased as she proceeded, and Mr. Ferguson, seeing her thus kindle for love of the dead man, felt unenviable things. Considering the witch's cauldron of love, jealousy and passion that was stirring in him, he held himself admirably in hand. Though his pulses leaped and quivered, his brain was clear.

"Dear Mrs. Diberto," he said, with a little hesitation, for to that hour it was hard for him to address her thus, "I am wondering whether you will be very angry with me if I dare say what I think."

"My friends may say what they please," she flashed at him, fiercely magnanimous.

Looking at her, so beautiful in her golden glory of youth, so pathetic in her mourning suit and furs, so palpably trying to crush out of her heart every trend of thought and feeling that led back to normal life, a horrible dread came over him, lest his intense love for her

would interfere with his sane judgment, and betray him into committing some irretrievable error.

"I think," he said, speaking slowly, "that you are suffering so cruelly at the present moment not so much from grief for your husband as from a desire to keep that grief alive and raw. You are prolonging your grief deliberately beyond the period when, in the natural course of life, it would begin to mellow and ultimately to heal."

Cheeks aflame, she turned and faced him. Surprise and anger contended for supremacy in her voice.

"Do you accuse me of hypocrisy in my grief?"

"Nothing was further from my mind," he replied. "Your grief is sincere, and it is poignant, but you are subject to the same laws that control the lives and thoughts and desires of all humanity, and, I repeat, you are wilfully opposing yourself to the softening influences of time."

She tilted back her head, and her words betrayed her scathing scorn of such sentiments.

"Your words sound much like the words of Hamlet's uncle-father, in chiding him for his grief for his true father."

Matthew heard her calmly.

"The passage you refer to is one of the most brilliant passages in Shakespeare, because, in placing truth in the mouth of one who was a monument of falseness and insincerity, he made him real flesh and blood. And you must not forget that Hamlet's ill-balanced grief makes nine-tenths of the critics concur in the belief that his mind had become unhinged through brooding upon his loss."

"Ah!" Doris's face went from white to red at this unheard-of insolence. He wondered vaguely what she would do to discipline him, declare her superiority over him because she was his employer—he would have con-

sidered her justified in doing even so crude a thing as that—rebuff his impertinence with some sarcasm, or what? He was not prepared to have her take him still further into her confidence.

"Don't you think that any deep sorrow is prone to unhinge the mind for a little while? I mean, no one is quite normal for months after the death of someone who has been very dear. If we were normal, we could never bear the parting." She had remained calm, dispassionate, wholly loyal to thoughts of her deceased husband so far, but suddenly he saw that his shaft had struck home after all, and that she was quivering under it with anger and annoyance. "You are saying charming things to me this morning," she concluded.

He rejoiced exceedingly that he had made her angry. Any emotion whatever was better than the chronic passivity in which she allowed herself to languish. In accusing him of rudeness she admitted him to a certain intimacy with herself which delighted him hugely.

They had stopped walking of one accord some minutes before, when the conversation began to approach its present boiling point, and he, flashing his bewildering, brilliant smile at her, and choosing his words as if they were so many precious stones, each one of which must bear the burden of a telling value in the general design, said in his most ingratiating, caressing voice:

"My dear Mrs. Diberto, I have said too much not tc say more. But, before I embark upon that 'more,' I beg of you to remember that it is impossible for an impressionable young man to spend a week or more in close propinquity with a woman who, like yourself, is exquisitely good and kind, without conceiving for her an enthusiastic admiration and respect, and a desire to serve her loyally."

She had been angry, very angry, when he began speak-

ing, and the ravishing experience of the intellectual lover fell to him to see her respond instantaneously to his words and the insinuating cadences of his voice. She anticipated what he was about to say, and she anticipated things other than those which he actually said, which was precisely what he had counted on her doing. He knew enough of women to know that no woman, no matter how engrossed she is in loving her chosen partner, is honestly displeased by the admiration or love of another man. He knew, also, that all women who are both beautiful and humane prefer comments upon their beauty to references to their goodness. His words were chosen with an astuteness which, had his intentions been other than virtuous, would have been diabolical. Twice he saw her rise to the bait which he dangled before her; to the promise of telling her that she was infinitely beautiful, and to the expectation that he would declare himself in love with her. And, having cleverly raised her expectations, he disappointed her both times by speaking only of the insipid quality of goodness, and of the colorless emotion of admiration.

He read her disappointment, of which she herself was scarcely aware, in the expression of the beautiful dark eyes, turned toward him with the blind look of impotent mortification.

Having thus reduced her to a state of helpless submissiveness he continued to have his say. The circumstance that he was absolutely sincere in every word he uttered made his manner all the more compelling.

"You are quite right in saying that anyone who has truly loved another person, whatsoever the relationship which existed between the two, can never wholly forget the departed one. But I quarrel with you on the ground that you invariably associate the memory of your husband with death. Try to dissociate it from the bier, the

pall, the casket. Try to think of him as he was when alive. You say he loved rain and snow and sunshine, croaking frog and cawing crow a hundred times more than you or I. Then why run away from those things? Why not take them to your inmost heart and feel that you love them more, much more than ever before, because he loved them so deeply? You will discover in them a new beauty, a new sanctity, almost because of this thought. And, more than that, when the wind blows, when the rain splashes, when the snow weaves its blanket of eider-down over the earth, wind and rain and snow will seem instinct with him, they will seem to bring you a message from him. If you foster that spirit do you not see that he will continue to be part of your daily routine in a sweet, sane, wholesome way? And you will be paying him a finer tribute than by repining supinely."

"What you say is beautiful," she replied in a low, awed voice. "But you did not know him"; and suddenly, without warning, the bulwarks of her reserve went down, and she poured out with burning fluency the sorrow, grief, despair, longing which had been her portion since her husband's death. There was something terrible in her sudden lack of reticence in grief. On and on ran her words, admitting him into intimate crevices of her soul and heart which he had never hoped to penetrate so quickly, and he had acumen enough to perceive that, in being so frank with him, she was not paying him a compliment, but was merely obeying the world-old impulse of the human heart to unburden itself of its oppressions. She gave no thought to his personality at the moment, and he knew it. He might have been a stone statue for all she cared.

"If only there had been some work for me to do. If I had had a child, his child, to care for it would have meant so much to me. At first I hoped—but it was not

to be." She halted, and he thought that she had become aware at last of her singular candor, but suddenly she burst into a tempest of tears. "How I prayed for a child," she sobbed, and abandoned herself to weeping.

Mr. Ferguson had borne all her asseverations of love of her husband with a fortitude begotten of his divine love for her. But he would have been more or less than a man if this cry of hers for a posthumous child of her husband's had not stung into life both his passion and jealousy. He longed with an intensity that swept over him like a tidal wave to take her in his arms and hold her to his heart. He placed his arm about her waist and murmured: "Doris, Doris," then recollected himself and thanked heaven that the sound of her weeping had drowned his words. To touch her hand while she was weeping for another man, with longing such as his in his heart, he felt was loutish and low.

He regained control of himself in a moment's time. He still longed to take her in his arms and to soothe her, but now there was in his desire to do so nothing to blush for, for the wish was born purely of his affection and compassion for her. It was impossible to let her stand alone in the middle of the path weeping and shaking from head to foot. He put his hand under her arm and, supporting her, led her to a bench which stood on a large rock at a bend of the road. The boulder was entirely dry and he forced her to seat herself. Then he spoke to her gently.

"Now, Mrs. Diberto, I want you to be a brave woman and get the odd notion out of your head that you must continue to make yourself unhappy. I think I have never met any human being who is more bitterly unhappy than yourself."

"Do you really mean that?" He wondered at the strange inconsistency of the human heart, for he could

see that his words afforded her considerable consolation.

"I really mean it," he said, "and I want you to try to overcome this unhappiness."

Her reply was unexpected.

"I wish you had known Lawrence. It would help you understand the peculiarity of my grief for him. So often when death comes we can rightfully say, 'It is well that all is over.' But Lawrence was the embodiment of happiness and of joy in living. He adored life. To him living was a fine art—the finest of the fine arts, to which all others were subordinate. He—you are sure I am not boring you?"

His glance was sufficient to reassure her, and she continued, almost happily it seemed to him, because she was able to talk of the man whose memory engrossed her so completely.

"You know Lawrence and I grew up together. All through school we were sweethearts in child fashion. He was a very beautiful little boy, with dark, shining curls and the softest, most liquid black eyes imaginable. And he was always beautifully dressed. He was very brave and devoted to me and terribly, dreadfully jealous. Once he fought his own brother, his twin, because Vincent tried to kiss me against my will."

"Vincent was his only brother?"

"Yes, and they looked exactly alike, or would have if Vincent had kept himself as nicely as Lawrence. But in those days Vincent was always messing with toads and snails and caterpillars, and I remember that, as a little boy, his fingers were always stained with rust because he used to throw rusty nails into vinegar in order to remove the warts which he got from handling the toads."

"A horrible little boy, eh?"

"Oh, not worse than other boys, but Lawrence was

such an adorable little boy, always." She flashed a dazzling smile at nowhere in particular as she resumed:

"It would have been well for Vincent if he had never done anything more horrible than grow warts. He grew to be a great dandy—a very much greater dandy than Lawrence, and he ended very unhappily."

"What happened after the trouncing that your husband gave his brother?"

"Oh, nothing in particular. At least, I do not remember. I was so taken up with Lawrence, I dare say. He was so intensely in love with life even as a child. He used to tell me that he loved me and life equally well, and one day, early in spring, just such a day as this when one feels spring rather than sees it, he came running into our dining-room crying, 'I am so glad I am alive, I am so glad I am alive.'

"It seems curious that I, who was a child along with him, should remember him so vividly as a child. To me he was and always will be the beau-ideal among children. He was simply perfect and his manners and speech were as exquisite as his person. Half the time when I think of him it is not the lover or the husband who comes back to me, but the little lad in black velvet with collar and cuffs of real lace and buttons of real silver and the most wonderful pair of black eyes in all the world. After his death I hoped so passionately that there might be a child, a son——"

Her voice trailed away and broke. Suddenly she blushed crimson. For the first time she seemed to realize that she had done an unusual, perhaps a bold and unbeautiful thing in giving such a confidence to a man.

Looking up into his face with a look of exquisite entreaty she spoke pleadingly:

"I hope you do not think it particularly horrid of me to have spoken of that?"

"I think," Matthew rejoined very gravely, "that it is high time that you discharged your pent-up feelings in conversation with some friend, and I am glad that you consider me worthy to receive your confidence."

She thanked him, but her embarrassment deepened, which did not displease him. If it had not been for the danger which menaced her he was truthful in telling himself that, for the moment, he would have been satisfied to allow his compassion for her full sway. But the sinister figure of Colonel Chalmers that hovered in the background urged him to allow no occasion to pass that would further his own cause.

He watched her color waver to and fro and pretended not to notice it, making a great ado in picking some arbutus leaves which, whether preserved from the previous year's growth or whether a premature harbinger of spring, were green and fresh. But even as she admired the delicate tracings on the face of the leaf which he pointed out to her her uneasiness was unmistakably apparent, and so great was this sudden nervousness that it communicated a similar nervousness to him.

Once their eyes met sharply, encountered each other as if for the first time, and he realized, with a deep sense of exultation, that the episode marked an epoch in their acquaintanceship. Henceforth he was no longer a poor broken-down young man, to be treated with tender courtesy because of his dependent position, but a personality to be reckoned with. She had become conscious, quite suddenly, through a confidence which she herself had made, that he was not a sexless creature, but a man.

He spoke of indifferent things. Her replies were labored. Presently, to escape from the intolerable situation, she offered to show him the way to Diberto Pool.

The path they took was narrow and the moisture-soaked earth, reddish-black and sticky because soaked

through and through with water, had started a series of tiny rivulets across the trail of the path making it slippery. Matthew led the way, turning frequently to stretch out a supporting hand to Doris. As she accepted the help he proffered he had the subtle satisfaction of seeing her color come and go.

Finally they stood beside the sinister, still water. It lay perfectly still with a glassy quietness, unruffled by eddy or current, murky, impenetrable, smooth as a mirror, and, like a mirror, because of the rich deposit of leaves, pine-needles, and forest refuse upon its bottom, it reflected their images with a sickly, greenish, glistening light.

"Is it deep?" he queried.

"They say it is bottomless in parts, where the waters, running through a subterranean passage, connect with 'The Glen.'" She shivered. "Let us go away," she said. "I should not have come here. You know it was here that poor Vincent ended his miserable life."

He had forgotten it.

"What had happened?" he asked.

"Let us go away from here first." Slowly they retraced their steps, and, after they had emerged into the sunshine, as they strode along over the damp, soft earth with its rich deposit of the mold of last year's autumn leaves, Doris told him the story of Vincent Diberto.

As she had indicated before, he had grown to be a gentleman *point devise* in appearance, but of the most undesirable morals. On finding that his uncle, old Pietro Diberto, would not pay certain of his debts which were of an unsavory character, he forged his uncle's name to a check of twenty thousand dollars at a time when his uncle lay at the point of death. There was no hope, apparently, of saving old Pietro Diberto, and, as his two nephews were his co-heirs, the unutterable rogue hoped

that his crime would escape detection, or, at least, counted on prevailing upon his brother to overlook the forgery should the check fall into his brother's hand after their uncle's death.

To everybody's surprise, however, the old man rallied; in due course of time the forged check, which had been cashed by the bank, was returned to him, and he was so infuriated by his nephew's utter heartlessness, as evinced by the proceeding, that, in a terrible interview, he threatened to turn the young man over to the law. Vincent made his escape from the house that same evening and the next morning an old hat of his was found impaled on a sharp stick near the Pool. It was believed that he had lost the hat during his flight the previous night, which had been dark, and that he had either fallen into the Pool or deliberately drowned himself.

The tragedy following so quickly upon the discovery of the turpitude of the boy whom he had loved as a son was old Pietro's death-blow. He lived long enough to make a new will leaving all his estate, personal as well as real, unconditionally to Lawrence Diberto, and then, at midnight of the following day, he died.

They had regained the bluff above the Pool and stopped to get their breath.

"Mrs. Diberto," Matthew said earnestly, "I want you to promise me to try to come out of your shell. I want you to promise me that you will try to make the most of the beautiful life which has been given you and which, you must remember, you can live once and once only. Try to be as happy as you can. Believe me, a man who loved life as intensely as you tell me your husband did would desire you to make the most of your own life, to achieve as much happiness as you can extract from life, irrespective of his death. Think of him as a wanderer who has reached the end of the journey only a little

while before yourself. After all, life is brief at best. Make the most of yours. Will you promise me this?"

She did not reply, and Matthew was forced to repeat his request. Still she did not answer, although he perceived that she had heard him distinctly. Suddenly she spoke.

"There is something I have not told you, something which has been largely instrumental in determining me to live as a recluse the rest of my life. You know, perhaps, how my husband died?"

Matthew nodded his head in assent and she continued.

"He lived just one brief moment after being thrown from his horse and during that moment I held him in my arms. He employed that brief respite in begging me to promise that I would not marry again."

"And you promised?" So fierce was Matthew's voice that Doris looked at him in amazement. Try as he would he could not banish from his eyes the look he knew was there; and he wondered if she understood its meaning.

"There was no time," she said. "He died before I could promise. You can imagine that I would have promised him anything he asked."

Matthew caught his breath. It seemed to him that he had been suspended in midair over a horrible chasm. And, now that he knew that the promise, which would have debarred Doris from becoming his or any other man's wife, had not been given, his heart exulted fiercely, viciously, brutally. Lawrence Diberto had been selfish, a poltroon, a cad, to try to force from his wife such a preposterous promise. Matthew glowed with the righteousness of virtue. He himself sat enthroned on the summit of the mountain of manly virtue at the nethermost base of which sat Lawrence Diberto. He understood what Mrs. Pultney-Greene had meant by saluting

him as "the better man." The better man! He should think so, indeed!

He recollected himself with a start. Calling on all his resourcefulness in argument he proceeded to exonerate Lawrence Diberto, because he knew that in praising the dead man to his widow that widow would be induced to look upon himself with kindly eyes.

"Good heavens," he cried with an impetuosity which was admirably feigned, "you surely do not so misjudge your husband as to believe that he would have exacted that promise if life had been spared him. Consider the episode as impartially, as dispassionately as you can. One moment he was full of life, the adored bride of six months at his side. Then in one cruel moment he was thrust out of paradise. You, a woman, perhaps can not comprehend just what ecstasy and pain and glory the loving of a woman means to a man. I, being a man, can fathom the agony of that supreme moment. His chief agony was not to be thrust out from life, but to lose you —you—the beautiful, exquisite, lovely woman whom he idolized! It is comprehensible, then, that, in that cruel vision of nothingness as far as you were concerned, his agony vented itself in a seemingly selfish wish."

"Not selfish," she said quickly, "not even seemingly so." Matthew loved her for defending her dead. His words came gently.

"All men are selfish when it comes to the woman they love, dear Mrs. Diberto; but the good man, and I judge from what you and others have told me that Lawrence Diberto answered that description, shackles his selfishness, refines it, purges it of its dross. The wish he expressed to you at the supreme moment was a selfish wish, and, if he had lived a moment longer, believe me he would have absolved you of the promise he himself wished to exact of you. I am positive of this and I wish I had a

silver tongue to impress upon you my man's viewpoint. Will you not take my word for it?"

Doris had a look of fright in her eyes.

"The thought has occurred to me—not that it matters one way or the other—but I am not certain that if Lawrence had lived a little longer he would have wished me to do otherwise."

That was unanswerable. He saw what the statement had cost her, for it was tantamount to stigmatizing her dead as selfish.

"Let us say no more about the matter, if you please," she said abruptly, as if this phase of the matter had presented itself as an afterthought.

They began walking homeward.

"You have not yet promised——" Matthew asked presently.

"What——?"

"That you will not keep to your rooms entirely while the Chalmers are at the Hall. And, above all, I entreat you, do not continue to spend your evenings alone."

"My evenings I must devote to Lawrence at least a little longer," she replied in a breathless sort of way. "And I cannot, I really cannot spend hours every day in the society of the Chalmers. They are Lawrence's relatives, and it is wrong of me to feel as I do, but I cordially detest them."

"Then why invite them to the Hall?"

To his utter confusion she burst into the merriest peal of laughter that he had yet heard issuing from her lips.

"They wait for no invitation," she said, "they come when the spirit moves them. Besides, mother enjoys having them so much."

In silence they walked homeward. The sun lay across their path in a broad band of gold beneath which the snow dissolved and the snow-water, burrowing tiny road-

beds for itself, trickled down gentle and abrupt declivities with a gurgling, fluty murmur, sweet as the song of a bird.

Looking at the woman at his side Matthew Ferguson saw in her face an unwonted look of fatigue. The emotional storm she had passed through had exhausted her.

"You are tired," he said. "Will you take my arm?"

She did not reply but he saw in her face the signs of a new tumult. He read in her mobile face the fact that she would have liked to take his arm and that she was struggling against the desire to do so.

"Take my arm, you are so very tired," he repeated in a low voice of passionate entreaty.

A flood of crimson swept over her lovely face and ran swiftly upward into the edge of her hair. Still she made no movement toward him, no gesture as if to obey his entreaty.

Very gently, almost caressingly, with a tender air of protection, he lifted her hand to his arm. When he looked at her face he saw her lips were tremulous and the color was wavering to and fro. She had closed her eyes and was allowing him to lead her. Her lips wore a smile of unearthly sweetness and her head was unconsciously inclined, ever so gently, toward his shoulder.

A multiplicity of emotions caused Matthew Ferguson's heart to contract painfully. Was she thinking of the past or glimpsing the future? Was that smile due to pleasure in walking with him in such delicate intimacy or to retrospection of former walks with the one who was no more? Were her feelings commingled into bittersweet by recollections of the tide that had gone out and by knowledge that after ebb-tide, inevitably, the tide must be high once more?

Was it possible, he asked himself, for a sweet, pure, good, modest woman to carry in her heart the images of two men at one and the same time, though one was dead and the other living?

He told himself that he did not know.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Mr. Ferguson Meets the Enemy at Last*

That same evening about five o'clock Hopkins entered the office where Matthew sat puzzling over the documents which represented the seemingly hopeless tangle into which the Diberto estate had fallen. The old butler waited respectfully for the young man to look up.

Finally Matthew tilted himself back in his chair.

"Do you want to see me, Hopkins?" he inquired, wholly unconscious that look, manner and tone were those of courteous but unquestioned authority.

"If you please, sir, there's been a telegram. Colonel Chalmers and Miss Chalmers arrive to-night, instead of to-morrow morning."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir, I thought, sir, so to speak, it would be of interest to you."

"I do not see, Hopkins, that the coming of the Colonel and his daughter affects me or my position here in any way."

"Oh, sir, making so free as to differ from you, it does, sir."

"Really?"

"Really, sir," Hopkins gravely assured him. "You have, sir, I trust been well satisfied with the service, sir, of the servants, including myself?"

"Good Lord, Hopkins," said Matthew, laughing; "you know that you are an ideal butler. You're not asking me, a poor secretary, whose position here is a temporary one, to give you, an old and trusted servant, a character, are you?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Well?"

"Oh, sir, I must make so free as to disrupt the farce, sir, much as I 'ate to do it, sir, of your being a mere secretary. You have all the h'earmarks of blood, sir."

"Don't you suppose a man can be a secretary and a gentleman, too?"

"As for that, sir, I'm a great believer in blood, and blood tells, I say. Along with us in the poor-'ouse, sir, there was a tiny shaver what was an earl's son, by the left hand, sir, begging your pardon for mentioning the offense, and the earl having died before the tiny shaver's birth, he was put into the poor-'ouse to be fed on pruans, pork-pies, parsnip puddings and prepositions, sir. But they agreed with him and he became a great scollard, sir, and sits on the woolsack. So you see, sir, that blood tells. But environment, sir, it tells, too, sir, especially when there is no blood to counteract the environment, so to speak, of which, sir, you have a living example in me. For there is no saying, Mr. French, which heights I might not have scaled in literatoor, sir, if the poor-'ouse had not disagreed with me. For I had a tremendous liking for such things, sir, when I was young, and I cannot say whether it was the pork or the parsnips or the pruans or the prepositions, sir, that turned me out a butler instead of a poet, though I am inclined to blame the prepositions, sir, for 'ow in 'eaven's name, sir, is a man who is writing poetry to stop and remember grammar?"

"Come, come, Hopkins, what is it all about?"

"This, sir, to be concise. When a man, sir, has the 'ear-

marks and the 'all-marks of the two b's, sir—not meaning thereby a bill-board nor a begging-bowl—when a man, I say, has all the h'ear-marks and the 'all-marks of breeding and blood, then, sir, I'm for knowing he is a gentleman."

"I gather that I comply with your standard."

"Oh, yes, sir! And so, sir, I beg you may take it in good part if the servants, myself included, after the coming of the Chalmers, should treat you, sir, with something approaching disrespect, sir!"

Matthew laughed.

"Hopkins," he said, "you are the most cryptic old fellow I know."

"You flatter me, sir."

"Do you know what 'cryptic' means, Hopkins?"

"That, sir, is why I say you flatter me. It's a difficult word, sir, and I'm sure you're too much of a gentleman to employ any word of which you are not certain that I know the meaning."

"But do you?"

"Sir, after what has taken place in words, sir, between you and me just now, were I to admit that I do not, sir, I should be telling you, sir, that you are no gentleman."

Matthew was vastly amused by the old fellow's glibness.

"Then you do know," he persisted.

"Sir, I do."

"Well, what does it mean?"

"Oh, sir, why should I tell you, who wouldn't have used the word without knowing its meaning?"

"I'll be obliged to you for a definition, Hopkins. Sometimes we use words loosely without knowing their exact meaning."

"Then, sir, far be it from me, whom destiny marked for a poet but the poor-'ouse turned out a butler, to boast

vauntingly of any knowledge I enjoy which you, sir, do not possess."

Matthew Ferguson sat back and laughed.

"Are all the servants going to show me disrespect?" he inquired.

"All, sir, when the Colonel or Miss Amy is around. You see, sir, the Colonel is a shrewd, peppery-tempered old gentleman, and if he perceives that we are uncivil to you, sir, and you patiently bearing it, he will conclude, sir, that his estimate of you as a gentleman was all wrong, and that the servants' estimate of you, sir, is all right, it being known that servants who have lived in good families all their lives, sir, are uncommonly quick in appraising a man's social standing."

Matthew was impressed by the old chap's knowlege of human nature. He remembered what Mrs. Pultney-Greene had said of the old man's fidelity and made no attempt to fence.

"Do you know why I am here, Hopkins?" he inquired.

"To break up the scheme of that perepperept Colonel," said old Hopkins with unction.

"Perepper—what? I've heard you use the word before, Hopkins, and I beg of you not to allow false modesty to stand in the way of enlightening me as to the meaning of this remarkable word."

Hopkins inclined his head to one side.

"If you please, sir, it's a word we poor-'ouse boys invented for things of which we disapproved."

"It's a wonderful word, Hopkins," said Matthew gravely.

"That it is, sir. It came to be invented in this way. As I've respectfully remarked before, sir, we were brought up on pruans, parsnip puddings, pork-pies, and prepositions, sir, and so we came to think quite naturally, sir, that the letter 'p' was the most pestiferous letter in

the alphabet, for you will note, sir, that in poor-'ouse, pork-pies, pruans, parsnip puddings, and prepositions there is a noble assemblage of 'ps' and so, sir, to vent our feelings properly we invented a word that was almost all 'ps.' I trust, sir, I have explained the origin of the word to your satisfaction?"

"You have," said Matthew gravely.

"Well, sir, seeing that the Colonel is a relative, sir, the servants, having proper family pride, cannot blankety-blank him, sir, as he deserves, so they've adopted my word, sir, in referring to him."

"Well, if necessary," said Matthew Ferguson, "I will adopt the word also."

"Thank you, sir," said old Hopkins. "Don't you 'ear something, sir? It's the Perepperepts. They got here earlier than we expected."

Away he ran into the hall and down the stairs to open the door in person and Matthew Ferguson, following a blind impulse, locked in a drawer the papers on which he had been at work, and, taking up the first book that came to hand, descended to the main floor, reaching it just in time to see the tall, soldierly man whom he had seen speaking to Doris last midsummer eve shaking Mrs. Pultney-Greene by the hand with great effusion. Beside him stood a very young lady, who was small, dark, and rather pretty, or would have been pretty—Mr. Ferguson modified his first impression—if it had not been for the shifting, uneasy expression of her snapping black eyes. It seemed to the young man that those cruel, false, treacherous eyes rendered the girl's beauty unwholesome and baleful.

He attempted to pass into the library when Mrs. Pultney-Greene intercepted him.

"Mr. French, I would like to present you to Colonel Chalmers. Colonel, Mr. French is my assistant. You

will rejoice for my sake to learn that Doris has consented to let me have a secretary while I am going over our accounts."

"Delighted, I am sure," said the Colonel without the quiver of an eyelash. "Glad to meet you, sir." He regarded Matthew tranquilly with a pair of shrewd black eyes, tinctured with an expression of kindliness, either genuine or spurious, which his daughter's eyes lacked. "Glad, sir, I assure you, of any acquisition to our little household. Do you play whist, sir? Pinochle? Skat?"

Mr. Ferguson confessed to whist and pinochle, but disavowed all knowledge of the scientific German game. The Colonel once more proclaimed himself delighted.

"Welcome news for my daughter," he said, "she has been dull here without any young person in the house."

"Doesn't Mrs. Diberto play cards?" Matthew asked innocently.

The Colonel glanced at him shrewdly.

"You have not been here very long, I see," he said drily.

"Will you not present me to Miss Chalmers?" Matthew asked evenly.

"I beg pardon, sir. Amy, my child, Mr. French."

Amy Chalmers, whose back happened to be turned toward her father and Mr. Ferguson, turned her head slightly without moving her body. When her face was on a parallel line with her shoulder her greeting was uttered in a twittering, discordant falsetto.

"How-de-do, Mr. French." Then, wriggling herself to her father's side, twisting and writhing, she purred kittenishly:

"How can you say, Pah-Pah, that I care for cards? Because I don't, you know, not a little bit. Though it is dull here, I admit."

"Pah-Pah," holding himself very erect, looked down

upon the writhing figure at his side with an inscrutable look in his beady black eyes.

"I am going to retire at once," Amy tittered. "Such a day, *dear* Mrs. Pultney-Greene. Traveling is so tiresome."

"Won't you have something to eat before you go?" inquired Mrs. Pultney-Greene.

"Thank you, madame, I will," said the Colonel with great pompousness, and, as Mrs. Pultney-Greene turned to give instructions to Hopkins, the Colonel, holding up his right hand and spreading his puffy, square-tipped fingers apart as if his hand were a peacock that was spreading its tail, but—alas!—far less beautiful, said: "Just a few sandwiches, Hopkins."

"Oh, Pah-Pah," murmured Miss Chalmers, "how can you think of eating just before you go to bed?"

Colonel Chalmers disregarded his daughter's comment.

"Won't you join us in the dining-room, Mr. French?" he asked with a spacious sweep of his sturdy arm. "Since we are to be shipmates we must lose no time in getting acquainted."

Matthew acquiesced, wondering whether he would have been astute enough to see through the Colonel's wiles if it had not been for the slit curtain and other circumstantial evidences of his perfidy.

For, apparently, the Colonel was every inch a gentleman. So thoughtful of others, so civil to dependents, so irreproachable his maxims of life, so courteous and amiable and gentle habitually, that it was hard to believe him a dyed-in-the-wool villain. The very mannerisms of the man; his prolix pomposity of speech; his soldierly walk, in which the creaking rustiness of age was beginning to be apparent; his immactulate grooming, but, above all, his carriage, made him seem a very lovable old man.

Instead of serving sandwiches Hopkins brought in a

cold joint of lamb and a cold roast chicken which he placed before the Colonel, bidding James bring the bread and lettuce and fruit.

"I thought you were going to bring us sandwiches, Hopkins," remarked the Colonel suavely, "and here you are setting before us a Lucullian repast."

"Well, sir," said the dissembling Hopkins, "seeing that Miss Amy is so very tired, I thought it might be more interesting for her to watch you carve the fowl than wait for us to make the sandwiches."

"Oh, Pah-Pah," said Miss Chalmers with a jerk of her head, "Hopkins *will* treat me as if I were a little girl, still."

"Oh, no, Miss," remarked Hopkins, "but seeing, Miss, that you're so very dull here, with no young folks about to speak of," Matthew thought he detected the first note of promised insolence in that, "it is true, Miss, that Jeames and I try to please you in little things."

Whereupon Miss Chalmers clapped her hands and giggled.

"What a humbug that girl is," thought Matthew, and amused himself watching the almost imperceptible contemptuousness of mien with which Hopkins, at the Colonel's command, placed a plate for fruit for himself. Hopkins' manner toward the secretary, in fact, was a model of what a butler's demeanor should not be, and Matthew's respect for the old servant's craftiness and good judgment rose considerably.

"Hopkins is right," pouted Miss Chalmers, dallying with a pear, "I am terribly dull here. I do not see why my Pah-Pah would not let me go South with Aunt Parsons instead of making me come back to this God-forsaken——"

"My child," admonished the Colonel in a magnificent voice, "remember it is your dooty to be here."

"Duty!" snarled Miss Chalmers; it was doubtful whether her contempt was caused by the sentiment the Colonel had uttered or by his singular pronunciation of the word, to which she objected.

"We must all dew our dooty, my child. It is at present our dooty to afford our poor Doris such comfort as our humble company can bestow."

"I should think," said the rebellious Amy, "that it was Aunt Parsons' duty to look after Doris, rather than ours. She's her mother, and we——"

"Silence, my daughter," commanded the Colonel, in a voice in which he might have rallied a panic-stricken handful of deserters from his regiment. He sat bolt upright, his squat fingers again spreading themselves peacock-wise. Thus might a patriarch of old have enforced obedience from a hundred unruly members of his household. "We must dew our dooty," he asseverated, proclaiming this maxim with great gusto, "no matter how hard and difficult. No, suh!" his fingers closed as if drawn together by a web or an elastic and then opened again. "No, suh! No man shall say that Gage Chalmers, of Chalmersville, Virginia, ever failed in righteousness. I am neglecting my own affairs, suh," he was politely addressing Matthew now, "in order to serve my niece. Do I complain of that, suh? I do not. Gallantry, suh, to the ladies dictates that I must do so, and, though my own business interests suffer cruelly, as they are doing, I am happy, suh, to be able to be of use to my niece."

Having made this pathetic allusion to his own affairs, Colonel Chalmers proceeded to console himself with the wing of the chicken.

"You have heard of my poor niece's trouble, suh? Losing her husband under such tragic conditions?" he inquired, masticating a generous slab of chicken with great relish.

"I have, sir," said Matthew Ferguson.

"Very sad, very sad," said the Colonel, shaking his head and trying hard not to show his intense gastronomic enjoyment of the chicken. "Very, very sad, indeed," And there is no saying how often he would have repeated the phrase, which requires no great mental exertion and presents no insuperable hindrance to enunciation by a mouth crammed with good roast chicken, if his daughter had not suddenly interrupted.

"Awful. What I want to know is why Aunt Parsons doesn't 'dew' her 'dooty,' which would let us out beautifully."

Her impertinent mimicry of her Pah-Pah's vagaries of pronunciation passed unnoticed by the travestied gentleman himself, perhaps because the bit of chicken which he held delicately poised on his fork was a particularly tempting morsel.

Fixing his eye resolutely on the appetizing bit of meat he sat wagging his head dolefully from side to side with the most tragic air imaginable.

"Your poor Aunt Parsons cannot bear the gloom of this house of sorrow, my daughter, because of her heart trouble."

"Heart trouble! Pooh! Stomach trouble," chirped Miss Chalmers with an air of finality.

With a sigh occasioned doubtless by the fact that the pleasure of transferring the choice morsel to his mouth must be still further deferred, Colonel Chalmers laid the fork upon his plate. Evidently he meant to get through with all the tears and commiseration that usage commanded him to lavish upon the misfortunes of his various relatives before returning to the gustatory exercise which afforded him such enjoyment. His pleasure in eating would then be unhampered by the enforced display of sympathy.

His eye never strayed or wandered from the tip of the fork on which was impaled the bit of chicken.

"Aunt Parsons herself believes it is heart trouble."

Miss Chalmers burst into a violent shriek of laughter.

"If my aunt has heart trouble," she cried, "it's the kind that is caused by a certain gentleman who is sitting not very far away from me!"

"Hush, my daughter, hush," commanded the Colonel. He was genuinely mortified by his daughter's disclosure, so genuinely mortified that his eye for one moment traveled away from the fork. "What will Mr. French think of us?"

"I'm sure I do not care what Mr. French or Mr. German or Mr. Russian thinks of us!" And she burst into another shriek of laughter at what she considered a witticism of her own and, under cover of that horrible laughter, the Colonel at last transferred from the fork to his mouth the much-coveted morsel.

"Some port, sir?" inquired Hopkins at the Colonel's elbow.

"Ah! A new case?"

"We have opened two cases, sir, different vintages, 1881 and 1885. Will you try, sir, which is the better?"

It occurred to Matthew Ferguson that the old butler was playing the same trick on the Colonel which he had attempted to play on himself the evening of his arrival. He brought two glasses for the Colonel, entreating an opinion on the comparative merit of the two wines, and, unscrupulously abetted any leaning which the Colonel showed for one or the other, assuring him all the time that a gentleman such as Colonel Chalmers, of Chalmersville, Virginia, was sure to notice the teeniest weeniest difference in the bouquet pro or con, unless, indeed, the cold evening air had so affected his palate as to rob it of its usual cunning.

"Nonsense, Hopkins," said Colonel Chalmers, a little piqued by the suggestion. "I never heard of such a thing—never."

"I have heard it said, sir, that a man who had been exposed to the bitter cold of an extremely bad winter night for six hours ever after was unable to tell the difference between port and sherry, sir, by the taste of them."

Miss Chalmers signified her enjoyment by one of her peculiar squeaks.

"Because he was frozen to death, Hopkins, no doubt," she trilled.

"Now, Miss, that never occurred to me," said Hopkins blandly, looking very asinine meanwhile. "How clever you are, to be sure, Miss. Yes, sir, thank you, sir, which did you say was the better wine?"

The Colonel smacked his lips vigorously. It was impossible to defer commital of himself to one or the other vintage any longer.

"Both are good," he began.

"But," prompted the blood-thirsty Hopkins.

"This one, 1881, I think, was the bottle you poured from, is, I should say, just a trifle superior to the other."

"Just so, sir," said Hopkins. Then, by clever manipulation at the serving table, he contrived to discover the mistake which the undependable Jeames had made in bringing from the cellar two bottles out of the same case. He was disconsolate, was Hopkins. He all but tore his aged hair from his aged temples; but Colonel Chalmers, there was no gainsaying the extraordinary fact, had detected a difference in flavor in two glasses of wine from the identical case.

Mr. Ferguson had thought that the Colonel would lose his temper. He little knew the man. The Colonel sat

back and heartily laughed his enjoyment of the joke on himself. It is true that he laughed a little longer and a little more unrestrainedly and a little more boisterously than seemed compatible with the breeding of a perfect gentleman, so that his vociferous mirth did not ring quite true.

After Matthew Ferguson at last had bowed the newcomers out of the room he reflected that gluttony is so amiable a vice that its disciples should be characters of otherwise sterling worth. "If this man is a knave," he thought, and he had no doubt of the Colonel's knavery, "he is the most accomplished rogue I have ever met."

He went to the office and rang for Hopkins.

"Hopkins," he said, "just what was your object in playing that trick on the Colonel and on myself?"

Hopkins always chose the dramatic method, which is the indirect method, for telling a story.

"During the late Rebellion, Mr. French, when cloth gave out, old stuffs of every description—wool, cotton, and silk—were used to manufacture a dress goods which was called 'shoddy.' It was not silk nor cotton and, assuredly, it was not wool. It was just 'shoddy.' After the war, sir, that term became a term of, so to speak, opprobrium, sir, and was applied to anything or anybody purporting to be what that thing or that person was not. The evening of your arrival, sir, I had my suspicions of you—you didn't look like 'shoddy'—if you will forgive me, sir, for being so free as to offer any comment upon you—and I applied my wine test. I've never known it to fail, sir. The real gentleman, if he cannot tell the difference, will not be ashamed to say so. But the near-gentleman—shoddy, sir—he'll pretend, as we had an example to-night, sir."

Matthew shook his head and laughed.

"And then, sir, there is another thing. Would any

guest in a 'ouse like this, sir, I ask you, allow the servants to play a joke on him, as the Colonel knew we did to-night, and as we will do again, sir, as often as we please, if he were at all sure of his standing? He's not certain of that, sir. He's afraid that the lady of the house will not tolerate him much longer. He's not certain that he's wanted. He's not certain that we servants don't see through him. He's sure only of one thing—that he's got no business to be here at all."

Matthew glanced quickly at the old butler. He was amazed at the man's penetration.

"It's Colonel Perepperept's first maxim of social intercourse, sir, that a man who is shrewd conciliates everybody, even a servant, and never makes an enemy if he can help it. So he tolerates Jeames's antics, sir. You'll see what you'll see."

Mr. Ferguson certainly did see the very next day. The Colonel evidently had impressed his first maxim upon his daughter, for that young lady, who had been so wantonly impertinent to Matthew the evening before, greeted him at the breakfast table the next morning with a smirk intended for radiant good cheer, and devoted herself assiduously to him all through the meal.

As Matthew could not suppose that she had fallen violently in love with his memory overnight the only construction he could put upon her changed demeanor was that the same was due to her father's orders. In fact, she overdid her new rôle, just as she overdid her naïveté and her girlishness and her gayety.

A conversation between the Colonel and Hopkins was in full swing two minutes after the Colonel entered the breakfast room. Matthew, busy in warding off Amy's attentions, had not heard the beginning.

"It's very good steak, sir, finest Porter'ouse," Hopkins was saying.

"No, Hopkins, no!" protested the Colonel vigorously. "I am rheumatic. The doctor at Hot Springs says so, and the doctor ought to know. He has forbidden me all red meats."

"But, sir, the cook could fry it until it was quite well done and entirely brown," said Hopkins with feigned stupidity.

The Colonel patiently explained the meaning of "red meat."

"So I'll have a couple of eggs instead, Hopkins."

"Scrambled, sir? Omelet? Cook makes a new omelet, sir, a Japanese omelet with whipped cream and strawberries."

"Don't tempt me with strawberries and Japanese omelets," said the Colonel indignantly. "Strawberries are as bad for rheumatism as red meat."

"To be sure, sir," said Hopkins amiably. "To be sure, they're red, too."

The Colonel sniffed.

"I'll have the eggs coddled, Hopkins," he said.

"Coddled? Lord bless me, sir, did you say 'coddled'?"

"I did," said the Colonel, impatiently drumming on the table and looking greedily at the delicious bit of steak upon which Matthew was at work with leisurely luxuriance of enjoyment.

"But, sir," remonstrated Hopkins, "I've heard of babies that were coddled by their mothers, sir, and occasionally of young girls who are coddled by their——"

"You need not qualify, Hopkins," said the Colonel sternly.

"Very good, sir, thank you, sir. But I have never heard, sir, of coddled eggs. Who coddles them, sir?"

"Who do you suppose?" roared the Colonel, now thoroughly angry. He loomed across the table erect as a beanpole and his fingers, of course, were spread to the

four winds. "Who do you suppose? The cook coddles them, of course."

"But, sir, if the cook does not know how to coddle—meaning thereby, sir, he does not know how to coddle eggs, for, being a man, sir, there is no hallucination in my mind, sir, as to the cook's knowing how to coddle a g——"

"Silence!" shouted the Colonel explosively. "Haven't I told you not to qualify? James, go this instant and tell the cook to coddle two eggs for me."

"Certainly, sir, very good, sir, thank you, sir," said James, in perfect imitation of the manner of his superior, the butler. And, as James was a loyal soul, he was to be depended upon for bringing back the proper reply from the cook, which he did in about five minutes. Hopkins, on receiving the whispered reply of his henchman, resumed badgering the Colonel.

"Cook says, sir, he knows five thousand different ways of preparing eggs, but coddling, sir, is not among them."

"Have you no cook-book in the house?" thundered the Colonel.

"Certainly, sir."

"Then tell cook to cook in the look-book," commanded the Colonel, wholly unconscious in his righteous wrath of the tangle into which his tongue had been betrayed by the recurrence of the double vowel.

James, loyal and intelligent soul, had come prepared for this.

"Certainly, sir," he said, "but cook says it is impossible to do so."

"To do what?" roared the Colonel. "Be explicit. Impossible to coddle eggs or to cook in the look-book?"

"Why, certainly, sir, I'll be explicit," said James and said no more.

"Well?" snorted the Colonel.

"Impossible, sir, to look in the cook-book. You see, sir, while the cook-book is all there—roasts and puddings and engtrays and all—the omelets, and the shirred eggs, and the scrambled eggs, and the poached eggs, and the devilled eggs, in fact, all the eggs, sir, are gone."

"Explain yourself," said the Colonel, seeking refuge in haughtiness.

"The rats 'ave eat 'em, sir," said James. "Rats is uncommonly fond of eggs, sir."

The Colonel sat in stony silence.

"I will tell you how to coddle eggs," he said at last, "so that you may tell the cook. Place two eggs, eggs of medium size——"

"Begging pardon, sir, must they be exactly the same size?" James inquired deferentially.

"As near as possible. And place them in a saucepan."

"Broken, sir?"

"An unbroken saucepan, of course," shouted the Colonel.

James said with perfect dignity:

"I was referring to the eggs, sir. Are they to go in the saucepan unbroken, or closed up?"

"Closed, unbroken," said the Colonel wildly. Matthew was just putting the last bit of his steak into his mouth and the Colonel was watching him with a starved look, a look that said as plainly as words: "Is all the world to eat and I only to go hungry?"

"Then," continued the Colonel, "having placed them in a sauce-pan side by side, you pour boiling water upon them, over them, to both sides of them and allow them to stand eight minutes, the saucepan being covered. If the eggs are smaller than usual seven and a half minutes will do. For large eggs eight minutes."

Said James in his uniformly deferential way:

"You spoke of medium-sized eggs first, sir. Now, I

suppose, the time for medium-sized eggs is seven and three-fourths minutes."

"Yes," snapped the Colonel, "and you do not want to use a dishpan or a bread trough, but an ordinary sized saucepan, just large enough for the eggs to repose peacefully side by side."

"Just so, sir," said James and withdrew.

A little later he returned with the eggs. The Colonel, who was holding forth upon some recollection of the Civil War, broke them while continuing his narrative. Suddenly he spoke with lusty indignation, in a voice of damnatory judgment:

"James, these eggs were not coddled; they were boiled."

"I gave cook your orders, sir."

"Have the cook in."

Whereupon James ushered in the cook with the remarkable preamble, "The cook is served," and the Colonel minutely explained just what difference boiling and coddling made in the white of the egg, and the yolk of the egg, and the digestibility of the egg.

"Since there is no one in this house who will coddle the eggs for me," he concluded, "I will coddle them for myself. Bring me a saucepan and two eggs and boiling water."

The appliances for coddling being placed before the Colonel, he poured the boiling water over the eggs, placed his open-faced watch on the table before him, and resumed his spirited account of a cold night during the War when a particularly hazardous task had been required of some private soldiers.

"And as cewl as a coocumber," said the Colonel, "I assure you, suh, as cewl as——"

Alas! The saucepan with the eggs and the boiling water stood in close proximity to the Colonel's left elbow, a proximity which was rendered perilous because of the

Colonel's spacious movements. The sequel is obvious. With a splash the boiling water poured itself over the Colonel's knee, and the not yet coddled eggs broke themselves upon the same point of vantage, flecking the Colonel's immaculate pearl-gray trousers with golden splotches. The Colonel uttered a cry of mingled pain and annoyance, for the water was scalding hot, and began dancing and prancing about the table, a living illustration of the reverse of that "coocumber cewlness" which had excited his admiration.

That first breakfast was a sample of the meals that followed. The graduate from the poorhouse régime, ably seconded by James, developed a truly astounding fertility in devising ways and means to harass the Colonel. He chose such times when Mrs. Pultney-Greene was absent from the table, an occurrence which, with the coming of the invaders, was not unusual. Nor did Mr. Ferguson wonder that Doris preferred to absent herself from the daily opera-bouffe in progress during meal time, and, instead of regretting her absence, the unexpected turn that events were taking, in that Miss Chalmers very evidently desired him to make love to her, made him thankful for Doris's absence.

Matthew did not dare disappoint Miss Chalmers' expectations of an amorous adventure, or at least a violent flirtation, for the overtures she made were many and manifest. He felt certain that she was acting throughout under Colonel Chalmers' orders. The crafty old soldier, no doubt, hoped to win as a partisan a man who was the declared lover of his daughter.

The young lady, with the most engaging and artless frankness, lost no occasion for making it plain that she was very much interested in him. Her slight stature served her as a sort of warrant of conduct for exhibiting herself in a way which for a larger woman would have

been utterly impossible without foregoing her claim to respectability. She perched herself on the arm of the chair on which Matthew sat reading and looked over his shoulder, or, invading his especial domain, the office, she spread herself over his desk and laughingly defied him to go on with his work.

Mr. Ferguson was a man of strong likes and dislikes, especially where women were concerned, and he thought it providential that he detested this girl as wholeheartedly as he did. Convinced as he was that she was an adventuress and a tool in the hands of an unscrupulous father, he felt that it would have been impossible for him to submit to her familiarities if these had failed to arouse in him a profound and utter disgust.

She had a way of pressing her shoulder against his arm when they walked through the hall or garden together which annoyed him intensely. And yet he was thankful that she made these bold overtures. So repugnant was the task of flirting with her that, in spite of his love for Doris, in spite of the fact that he keenly realized that he must give the Colonel this earnest of his partisanship if he wished to unmask the man, he felt he would have failed lamentably at the task if Amy had waited for him to take the initiative.

Even so he had qualms of conscience. In this extremity he bethought himself of Tommy Burbridge and his offer to furnish him with items of conduct concerning every dubious character in the civilized world. For, to Matthew Ferguson, this girl was permeated with the peculiar, intangible, undisguisable aroma which marks the questionable character.

Tommy's reply came promptly, and was brought to the servant's floor one evening by Stuart, for the "human Waterbury" acted as confidential emissary for Matthew whenever occasion demanded.

Tommy's statement of facts was couched in language that was terse and compact to the point of meagerness:

"Lady in question seen two winters ago in Monte Carlo, where she won conspicuously at roulette. Made great show in Geneva shortly after; trapped a Russian prince into an engagement, who, learning financial *status quo,* suspended the engagement, pending the securing of sufficient dowry of not less than a quarter of a million. Father, while in his cups, reputed to have said he would get dowry within two years, fair means or foul. But this item is not vouched for."

"Very pretty," said Matthew under his breath. "So that is where Doris's money is to go. Hereafter, my fine lady, I will play fast and loose with your unblighted affections without compunction."

"Anything I can do for you?" inquired Stuart.

"Thanks, no. Any news?"

"Mrs. Parsons, with bag and baggage, arrived at the station just as I left the postoffice."

"She was not expected just yet," said Matthew.

"With the lady the unexpected is always the expected," Stuart remarked.

"Stuart," said Matthew, "how in thunder do you happen to know all about pretty nearly everybody up here. You're a stranger in these parts like myself."

"Well," said Stuart, "in the first place, I have a naturally curious mind. In the second place, folks up here have nothing to do in winter but to gossip. In the third place, realizing there is no other amusement to be had, I overcame my dislike for gossip. In the fourth place, sometimes these chaw-bacons are really worth listening to. In the fifth place, I'm collecting facts for a rural novel."

"In the sixth place?" inquired Matthew.

"For the love of Mike," Stuart rejoined, "you don't

expect me to give you half a dozen reasons for every little phase of conduct, do you?"

"I do not know what I expect, Stuart. But I do know that Mrs. Parsons was not expected and I would like to know just what her reason is for coming." Matthew was vaguely troubled. Did the Colonel intend using Doris's mother in the conspiracy against the daughter? Had his presence precipitated the very thing he had hoped to combat?

"Well," said Stuart, ruminating slowly, "she came today because, in the first place, she likes to surprise her daughter; in the second place, the Colonel is an attraction; in the third place, she probably does not know her own mind an hour ahead; in the fourth place, because she is a character, and prides herself upon doing and saying the unusual thing at the unusual time; in the fifth place, because she comes to Diberto Manor, it is said, to replenish her means of sustenance."

"Oh!" said Matthew Ferguson, "do you believe that?"

"I take a good many things I hear with a pinch of salt, and some require a whole barrelful."

"Confound it," said Matthew, "there she is now." The honk-honk of an automobile was heard coming from the front driveway. Poor Matthew was intolerably nervous. If Mrs. Parsons were to remember him he would find himself in a pretty pickle. He communicated his fears to the inscrutable Stuart.

"Why didn't you shave off your moustache before you came up here?" inquired that astute young man.

"Why, Stuart, I have no moustache now, nor did I ever have one in all my life."

"That was very thoughtless of you," retorted Stuart. "You should have worn a moustache formerly in anticipation of this event. It's the way folks disguise themselves in detective yarns."

"Well, I never wore a moustache at any rate," said Matthew, irritably.

"Well, then," said Stuart, "why didn't you dye your gray hair black or brown?"

"Man, what's ailing you? Do I look like a nonogenarian? I haven't a gray hair, nor ever had in all my life."

"Neither a moustache to be removed nor gray hair to be dyed black or brown! Well, well," said Stuart, contemplatively, "one deficiency would have been excusable; but two such palpable oversights are unpardonable, Mr. Fergu—French—I almost called you Mr. Franco-American. You've been criminally neglectful. I don't see what's to be done."

"You're intensely aggravating to-night," said Matthew. The situation at the Hall was so precarious as to unnerve him completely, and Stuart's nonsense savored of levity.

"Am I really?" Stuart demanded. "I am so glad to hear it." He really seemed pleased.

"Look here, Stuart," Matthew began, but the canny Scot interrupted him.

"No, you look here, Matth-Montrose. I'm only human, and we all have to look out for Number One in this world of mutation and change. I find that when I succeed in irritating people they come out of their shell very quickly and disport themselves for my especial benefit—the benefit of the future novelist, you understand. So I've made a point of cultivating the quality and I'm delighted to have a friend like yourself who is always candid with me tell me I'm progressing. As to a change in your appearance——"

"No more Sherlock Holmes suggestions, if you please."

"Seems to me I have read in some magazine's 'Corner of Celebrities' or 'In the Public Glare,' or 'In the Limelight of Publicity' that one Matthew Ferguson, of New York, wears brown exclusively."

"And is my piebald appearance sufficient to mask my identity?"

"As far as Mrs. Parsons is concerned, certainly. She may tell you that you remind her of some one, or that she has seen you before—they say she tells almost everybody one of the two things—just you say to her that she met you at some hotel."

"What hotel?"

Stuart puckered his brow reminiscently.

"Let me see! She was down at Palm Beach last winter; two winters ago she was at Aiken, and she summers at the Aspinwall, in Lenox. So you have your choice."

"Stuart," said Matthew Ferguson, "that is an inspiration, no less."

He was intensely grateful for the "inspiration" which had put him in a state of preparedness, when, in crossing the hall, Mrs. Pultney-Greene called to him from the open drawing-room door to come in, that she might introduce him to Mrs. Parsons. The Chalmers were both there and so was Doris.

"A secretary, did you say?" exclaimed Mrs. Parsons, regarding him as she would have regarded a curious piece of furniture. "Now, isn't that nice?" The question was put with a conviction that was baffling.

Mr. Ferguson smiled feebly.

"A secretary is such a convenience," continued Mrs. Parsons, agreeably. "I never travel on a train unless I am sure there is a stenographer on board. Never."

"And do you require a stenographer on the train to write the multitude of your love letters for you?" inquired the Colonel, bending over the little, fat old lady with a perfectly killing air of devotion.

"Naughty man! As if I would dictate love letters!

To punish you, the next letter I write you shall be typewritten."

"Then, pray, ask Mr. French to type it for you, as he is in the secret and a very discreet young man at that."

"Oh, yes, aunt," gushed Amy, "he's the soul of discretion, aren't you, Mr. French?" She sidled up to him and he feared for one awful moment that she would begin fingering his coat lapels or tug at his buttons, as she had an annoying habit of doing—annoying, since it made them come off and he was not much of a tailor. But she merely stood beside him looking up into his face with adoring glances. Poor Matthew, knowing that Doris's eyes were upon him, and trembling to think what construction she might put upon the scene, flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Would you really write a few letters for me?" inquired Mrs. Parsons.

"With pleasure, madame."

"Now, isn't that nice?" She beamed upon him. "I don't believe, after all, that I will have any letters, Mr. French, although, as I say, I never travel for any distance on a train that isn't equipped with a stenographer. It's such a convenience, you know. I never require a stenographer, but it gives one such a delightful feeling of security to know the stenographer is right there in case I were to require him. It's just the same, you know, about having a bathtub on the train. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Really, mother," said Doris, "I see no resemblance whatever between a secretary and a bathtub."

"Of course not, my dear. Not really a similarity, you know, but the feeling they give one is identical. I want a letter written, there's the secretary; I want a bath, there's the tub."

"I see, I see!" said the Colonel quickly in a tone in

which a Newton might have announced the discovery of some great natural law.

"Not that I would use the tub any more than I would use the secretary," continued Mrs. Parsons, whose powers of self-elucidation seemed unlimited. "I shouldn't like to take a bath on board a train, unless I dressed myself in a bathing suit. Such dreadfully funny things do happen in railroad smash-ups and in tornadoes. Fancy how a decent woman would feel if she found herself hurled through the air—bathtub, water, and all—and came to sitting right in the open without a bathing suit on."

"Mother!" exclaimed Doris; her usually pale face was scarlet.

"Well, my dear, I've shocked you, of course. I always do shock you. Don't I? It really is fortunate that we do not live under the same roof. How you can bury yourself here——"

"That's just what I say, Auntie," chirped Amy.

"Just because you happened to lose your husband!"

"Mother!"

"Oh, my dear, be thankful that you lost him while you are still young and pretty. Lots of fish in the same pond where the first came from, I say——"

"Mother, if you please——"

"And you are a very foolish girl, my dear, to shut yourself up like this. I suppose you will be wearing all-black right through the summer. Well, when I die, I beg of you not to go on wearing black for another two years, but to come out in pinks and blues, and whatever else you happen to have on hand. Mr. French, it does seem to me that I have met you before."

"Quite likely. I've been about a good deal," said Matthew, swallowing his laughter.

"Hotels?"

Matthew blessed Stuart for his suggestion.

"Yes. I've been as far south as West Palm Beach. I——"

"Oh; then I really did meet you before. You see, Mr. French, I just invented that—thinking I had seen you before—for when I see a young man is shy and backward and tongue-tied——" Matthew winced for Doris as this avalanche of unusual adjectives descended, "I always try to make him feel nice and comfy and at home with me by telling him that I must have met him before. It gives him a chance to say something, you know." She nodded her head vigorously. "Young men like to talk, so I seldom say anything at all when I'm with young men, except in the way of helping conversation along. I'm very popular with young men, Mr. French."

"I should think you would be, Mrs. Parsons."

"Well, I am. Very. And with oldish men, too. I had two offers of marriage last winter, would you believe it?"

"It is not incredible," said Matthew Ferguson, not daring to look at Doris.

"Good heavens, Mr. French," exclaimed the Colonel, "are we going to be rivals? Have a care, suh! I'm a dead shot, a dead shot, suh!"

"Oh, Pah-Pah, you wouldn't be so cruel as to shoot poor Mr. French, would you?" murmured Amy.

Doris heaved an audible sigh which was echoed by Mrs. Pultney-Greene.

"I wish," continued the incorrigible old woman, "that Doris would take a leaf out of my book. I will never be tired of living so long as I have a single admirer. Never. But Doris here——"

"I wish you would omit my name from the discussion," said Doris with repressed fury.

"Don't be cross with me the very first thing, Doris, or

you'll excite me and upset my heart," said Doris's mother.

"You know very well, Mother," said Doris, none too pleasantly, it must be confessed, "that it's not your heart at all, but your stomach."

"Stomach? Oh, Doris!" The reproach in Mrs. Parsons's eyes beggared description. "Stomach! My dear child, it's my heart!"

Doris melted.

"I don't see why you should be ashamed of having stomach trouble, Mother," she said. "It is quite as serious as any heart trouble could be."

"If I had stomach trouble," said Mrs. Parsons violently, "I would go and hide my head with shame. I contend, Colonel, that no person ever had stomach trouble except from over-eating."

"I do not feel qualified to judge," hedged the Colonel.

"Well, I do. And when they—the doctors I mean—tried to tell me it was my stomach, I said, 'What, a person like me who eats so little have stomach trouble? Nonsense. You had better go back to school.' My appetite is very, very small, Mr. French. All I eat for breakfast is a grapefruit, an orange, two rolls, two cups of coffee, two eggs, one chop, two pancakes, and fried potatoes. Now, I leave it to you, Mr. French, could any person with such a very poor appetite possibly have anything the matter with her digestion?"

"As the Colonel said a moment ago, madame, I do not feel qualified to judge," Matthew rejoined drily. He forgot for the moment that he was addressing Doris's mother.

"Well, it's my heart, anyhow. What's your first name, Mr. French?"

"My first name?" Matthew was bewildered by the lady's disconcerting change of theme.

"Your first name, yes. You've got one, haven't you? Otherwise what's the 'M' for? I hope not 'Morris.' I never can see an 'M'—I mean as an initial—but I think of the name Morris."

"No," said Mr. Ferguson coldly. "It's not Morris; it's Montrose."

"Montrose! Mrs. Montrose French! Not at all bad, Doris. I wouldn't be in the least surprised if a pretty young widow like yourself, with lots of money, were to attract a young man, like Mr. Montrose French, for instance."

Mr. Ferguson had not believed it possible that his gentle Doris could show such temper as she did. Indeed, Doris flared up with that incomparable viciousness reserved for gentle temperaments who enter upon the war-path.

"If Mr. French, or any other young man, were to be 'attracted' by myself, Mother, I would have just enough vanity to think it was really for myself and not for my money."

Mrs. Parsons looked at Doris with an air of injured innocence.

"Your temper is not improving, Doris," she said mildly. "It never was any too good. Men do not like women to have a temper, do they, Mr. French?"

Poor Matthew, standing between Doris and Amy, felt that whatever reply he might make must inevitably be a leap into the frying pan or the fire. Doris's quick eyes had already looked scathing contempt at Amy for regarding the young man with such unashamedly love-lorn eyes, and he had a horrible premonition that she might include himself in that scorn if his behavior during this grilling scene fell in the least degree below the wholly admirable. It was incumbent, apparently, to balance himself like a man on a tight-rope between the two women,

for Amy, watching him covertly, expected some attention from him.

"I am sorry to differ from you, Mrs. Parsons," he said adroitly. "Personally, I would not give a pinch of salt for a woman incapable of showing temper under certain provocations. What do you say, Miss Chalmers?"

Miss Chalmers twisted and writhed and beamed her satisfaction in being appealed to, twittering some unintelligible reply. Glancing quickly at Doris he saw her smile ever so lightly. He saw that he had pleased her by making his reply less pointedly directed toward herself by appending his cousin's name. He patted himself on the back for his deftness.

That initial conversation was significant of the general tone given to the house by Mrs. Parsons. At table, Colonel Chalmers paid court to her with sickening servility. Doris dutifully appeared at meals and strove heroically to stem the tide of frivolity, but finally succumbed to the maelstrom of inanity in which her mother and the Colonel moved.

And yet Doris loved her mother. Matthew Ferguson was filled with amazement as he saw her offer tender solicitude, gentle little attentions to the odd, seemingly heartless old woman. Mrs. Parsons's visits were always of brief duration, and, on the third day after her arrival, she announced at luncheon that she was going to leave immediately after the meal. She detested long periods of preparation for leave-taking, she said.

Doris begged her mother to stay on.

"Fiddlesticks," said Mrs. Parsons. "My heart has had all it can stand of this gloom."

"I thought, Mother," Doris said with tremulous lips, "that you were going to allow me to take the next trip with you."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Parsons tartly. "Nonsense.

I'd only shock you by my flirtations and you would drive me crazy with your mourning weeds."

"I'll wear black and white, or white only, Mother, if you will let me come with you," said Doris very gently. "And you shall flirt all you want to." A note of entreaty in her voice made her seem very young. Matthew Ferguson bit his lips until they ached, to repress the feeling of ineffable tenderness and love that swept over him for the desolate girl-widow.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Mrs. Parsons vigorously. "If you were to come with me do you think the men would pay any attention to me? Besides, my dear, if you parted with your all-black clothes you'd retrieve the deficiency in black by adding greater gloom to your face. No don't say another word about it," said this devoted mother, "or my poor heart will trouble me on the train. And on no account do I want you to come to the station with me. I would feel as if I were attending my own funeral with that face of yours beside me and those dreadful black clothes. Colonel Chalmers and Amy will see me off."

"Very well, Mother," said Doris quite meekly. In spite of the evident hurt which her mother's words had inflicted Matthew thought she must experience some sort of a relief.

Thus it happened that, after they had waved a farewell to the disappearing auto from the large terrace in front of the house, Doris and Mr. Ferguson found themselves face to face and alone for the first time in a fortnight.

As they entered the house Mr. Ferguson opened the door to the library, where a cheerful log fire was blazing, and, with a ceremonious gesture of the hand, invited Doris to enter. She sat down near the fire, holding out her finger-tips to the radiant blaze. The April day

was gray and chill and she had stood on the terrace with only a thin wrap about her shoulders.

Matthew, standing beside her, felt a sensation of possession sweep over him which was new and infinitely sweet. The feeling was so strong and pervasive that it seemed incredible to him that she should not be responding to it in some way. And there was in the feeling nothing gross or material.

The clinging black crêpe de chine dress which she wore made her shoulders seem abnormally narrow and thin. In spite of the warmth of the blaze her face remained white and cold, but he saw with delight as he glanced down at her hands that the firelight, showing through the cracks made by her closed fingers, was pink, and the delicate shell of the upper ear was illuminated by the fire into rosy transparency. A sudden desire came to him to take her in his arms and to hold her in a protective embrace against all the world, to whisper to her that here was one not wholly despicable man who worshiped the very ground she trod on. But Matthew Ferguson reflected a moment later, as his ever-present grim sense of humor asserted itself, that, even if there had been no hindrance to his declaring himself at the moment, a man as self-controlled as himself would hardly choose to voice his sentiments in such romantic language. His feelings lay deep beneath the surface, far too deep to find utterance in the facile, machine-made stock phrases that are the currency of less fastidious beings.

Suddenly she turned her head and looked up at him and, as her eyes met his, delicious waves of color rose from her throat and her cheeks and her brow and, expanding, met each other, coalesced and covered her entire sweet face with a rosy film.

"Did you speak?" she asked in a voice which to him sounded submissive. That element of submissiveness—

submissiveness to him—made his pulses leap with sudden fire. Only the thought that a premature declaration might, and probably would, lose him the possibility of serving her made him force himself to check the words that seemed bubbling in his throat ready to overflow.

"No, I did not speak. But I am going to do so."

Drawing up a chair for her he began abruptly:

"If you intend keeping to your rooms as you have been doing for the remainder of the Chalmers's stay at the Hall I want you to do me a very great favor."

"What——?"

"I want you to allow me to pay you a little visit, say, every third or fourth day. Will you?"

She became intensely nervous all at once and spoke evasively.

"I imagined and hoped that the Chalmers had recompensed you for my absence."

"Which of the Chalmers have you reference to?" he asked boldly. "The Colonel—or the lady?"

Doris looked him steadily in the eye.

Her words came slowly.

"The lady seems to find you very agreeable."

"Then, as she is a lady and I am a gentleman, it will hardly become me to say I do not find her agreeable." As he spoke Matthew Ferguson felt a sudden access of heat in his cheeks. Was Doris jealous? He could hardly believe that. Her next question, however, staggered him. Was she jealous, indeed? Or did she merely wish to see fair play.

"You have, of course, given her no reason to believe otherwise?" she asked.

"My dear Mrs. Diberto—how am I to answer that question?" He was distinctly annoyed. He thought it indelicate of Doris to make so pointed an inquiry in so pressing a form. "It is almost impossible to reply with-

out casting a slur on the young lady's deportment. There are women, Mrs. Diberto, whose manner is so unaccountable that it is almost impossible for a young man to associate with them without falling into a trivial tone which, to an observant onlooker, must appear much like a flirtation. Miss Chalmers is that type of girl."

"I infer, of course, that it is impossible for a young man not to take the tone you describe with such girls because the manner of which you speak as 'unaccountable' is so very attractive."

Matthew Ferguson looked blankly at Doris. Until that moment he held so completely the upper hand of her, because of his knowledge of what was going on about her, that he was considerably taken aback by the practical competence which she evinced so suddenly. He was nonplussed. To suspect her of petty jealousy was too absurd a thought to be entertained for the briefest moment. Her manner was dignified and it was firm. She looked at him tranquilly without the least embarrassment, but it was evident that she meant to have a direct answer. She intended to know just what was this young man's attitude toward her cousin. Suddenly it occurred to him that, although she disliked Amy Chalmers, she might, as a married woman, believe it incumbent upon herself to exercise some sort of chaperonage, however belated, over a very young girl, especially a relative, who was under her roof. The thought gave him a curious sensation. He, so masterful and domineering, was bowing submissively to the authority of the woman he loved, not because of his spurious position in her household, but as man before woman, as man before a woman who has been a wife. He felt himself tingling from head to foot.

"Miss Chalmers is not attractive to me," he said quietly. "Distinctly not."

"I am glad to hear it."

He said nothing. Her directness left him mentally agasp.

"It may seem a cruel thing to say of my husband's cousin," she continued, "but, having said so much, I must say more. Miss Chalmers is not quite as artless as she appears to be."

"That," he rejoined, "I understand thoroughly."

"And, as you are here under my roof, if I had discovered that you were being drawn into a net of enchantment which was not good for you I would have thought it my duty to rend heartlessly that net by sending you away."

"Good Lord," he said, "do I look as young as all that?"

"You seem very young to me, in some things, and very —chivalrous."

He laughed. He hugged his shoulders with his hands and laughed.

"So it is rather lucky for me that I did not desert my old friends for the new, eh?" he said.

Doris bent her head a little lower.

"Whom do you consider your 'old friends'?" she asked, and this time, however overlaid with dignity and aloofness, there was in her manner a distinct note of coquetry. "You've known me—Mrs. Pultney-Greene and me—just a month." She flashed him a blinding smile.

When he answered her it was in a voice mellow with concentrated emotion. He was half conscious of this but he did not care.

"Mrs. Diberto," he said, speaking rapidly, "when we speak of old friends and new, I think we do not refer so much to the period of time during which we have known this person or that as to our own rate of progress in confidences given and received. In other words, there are friends whom we may know all our lives but to whom we will never draw close in that spiritual com-

munion which is the essence of true friendship. There are other friends, friends of a different pattern, with whom, once we have met them a few times, that spiritual bond is irrevocably established, never to be severed again. You know as well as I that you and I have entered into this finer sphere of friendship, and, though we were to separate and not meet again for many years, the old footing of mutual trust and respect would continue."

She looked at him, alarm in her beautiful golden-brown eyes.

"If I have displeased you by anything I have said just now," he interposed quickly, without giving her a chance to speak, "forgive me. I did not mean to be bold; if I had been less bold I might have offended you by a seeming lack of appreciation of the friendship you have given me."

As she did not reply, he continued.

"That brings me back to the starting point. Will you allow me to pay you an occasional visit in your rooms?"

A fright which he could not comprehend again came into her eyes.

"I do not think I ought to," she faltered.

"Why not?" he demanded, audaciously.

She closed her eyes for a moment, as if nerving herself for a prodigious effort.

"I will tell you why not," she said finally. She bent forward a little and, as once before, he felt her breath on his cheek as she spoke.

"You will remember how I feel about mourning for my husband. Right or wrong, I must mourn for him in my own way—at least a little longer. But since you came into this house there has been a change in the entire atmosphere. We were as in a tomb—poor old Hopkins, poor Mrs. Pultney-Greene, and poor little me, with my crushed and bleeding heart. We were gloomy, and satis-

fied to be gloomy. But with your coming—the very evening of your arrival—it seemed to me that a vigorous, hardy, keen breath from the outer world, full of unrest and yet not unbeautiful, swept through these old rooms, quickening everything with life. I wonder," she concluded, smiling at him with a sort of indulgent admiration, "I wonder do you realize how intensely alive you are?"

"Yes," he said, "I think I do."

"I do not believe you do," she said, in a low, strange voice. "I think that only one like myself, whose entire thoughts, feelings, emotions were centered in a dead past, can realize how superabundant is that quality of yours, the quality of being alive, with which you have invaded this gloomy mansion. That was partially what I meant before when I said you seemed young. You are young and strong and alive—like spring. Lawrence also," she added reminiscently, and Matthew's heart leaped with joy to see how casually she mentioned that beloved name today, "was young and alive like spring, but his strength was different from yours. You carry with you an air of movement, of action, of accomplishment."

Matthew was at loss for a reply. Doris's quiet assumption of a mature outlook made him uneasy and less certain of himself. He had never passed through any supreme sorrow, and he realized with a start that a great grief has an educational value for both mind and spirit, the results of which are not obtainable in any other way. Doris, in brief, had reversed the tables. He did not feel himself her protector at the moment, but felt young and inexperienced and callow.

"I must not allow you to carry this dynamic atmosphere of yours into my rooms," Doris resumed. "They are dedicated to the past."

The statement was unanswerable. It admitted of no argument.

"Then allow me to see you on neutral ground," he said. "Surely, in this vast mansion, there is one room which you can reserve to yourself to receive a friend, or a dependent, whom you will not admit to more hallowed ground."

"You should not ask it," she answered evasively, "now that I have explained my position."

"You do not consider mine."

"What do you mean?"

"You are my employer," he began.

"Oh!" she protested.

"Employer," he repeated, "and as your employee I have the right to demand an occasional interview with you."

"You need never see me on business," she said quickly. "Whatever Mrs. Pultney-Greene and yourself decide upon will be quite right."

"Mrs. Diberto, I might as well say now what I have wanted to say to you for some time. Do you realize that an estate as enormous as yours should be placed in the hands of a competent lawyer, or administrator, whose chief business it will be to look after it?"

"I cannot be bothered, really."

"There would be no need to bother you once you have turned matters over to a reliable solicitor."

She faced him, a little angrily.

"I cannot tell you how sordid it seems to me to think of amassing more money, of conserving my interests, and all the rest of the wretched business connected with an estate. Am I not rich enough? I cannot, really and truly, I cannot be troubled with discussions about money, especially at such a time as this. To mix grief and business—detestable!"

"I think you are wrong, Mrs. Diberto. Has it occurred to you to look upon your vast wealth as a responsibility?"

"To whom? No one needs me."

"Everyone of us is either a help or a hindrance."

"I cannot see it. I can see my duty in one way only. Nothing else touches me. I've been placed beyond the pale of further suffering. I recognize no responsibility of any kind, and I fear no further blow that can be dealt me."

Matthew Ferguson fixed his eyes gravely upon Doris's face.

"Some day something may touch you very closely."

Doris shivered.

"Nothing," she said, "nothing, I repeat, can touch me." Pride and defiance spoke from her looks and manner. She seemed proud of her vaunted immunity, but in her defiance he read a token of alarm. His words had subtly frightened her.

"Nevertheless," he said, "I cannot help thinking that you are somewhat selfish in your self-centeredness."

"Selfish!" He witnessed one of the quick spurts of temper which sometimes burst volcanically from the usually unruffled crest of her behavior. "Selfish! Well, I've never been told before that I am selfish."

Suddenly, with one accord, they both raised their heads and listened. The automobile was returning. They could hear the voices of the Colonel and Amy through the still, brisk air.

"I am going to my rooms," said Doris. All her anger had faded. The return of the enemy had made her forget her grievance against this uncomfortable, impertinent and yet not unlikable young man. She remembered it distinctly, however, when she reached the door, which

he held open for her. He held out his hand deferentially, a look of entreaty in his eyes.

"You don't deserve to have me shake hands with you," she said. But she smiled as she said it and she placed her hand in his. Very calmly he placed his left hand over it and, as his grasp was firm, it was quite impossible for her, without a display of physical violence, to disengage herself. He beamed down upon her with a grandfatherly manner, but the light in his eyes was anything but grandfatherly. Doris chafed and shivered. She even struggled a little. It was evident that he was irritating her extremely.

"Do let go my hand," she begged finally, when the penetrating gaze with which he was regarding her had bathed her face with a rosy glow, merging deliciously with the intangible veil of gold that shrouded her skin. "You are holding me as if you were a truant officer," she added, with the first gleam of mischief in her eyes which he had ever seen there.

He released her immediately and spoke in an aggrieved tone.

"A truant officer, indeed! Who but you would think of such a comparison. A truant officer!"

"Wouldn't you like to repeat the words a half dozen more times?" she inquired politely, walking about the room, and returning to him, head held high, evidently to show him how very calm and self-possessed she was. A change had come over her. She no longer seemed an object of pity. The slim, fragile creature of a few minutes ago, in whose soul despair and despondency were enthroned, had vanished. At the moment she had regained her poise and she looked on mischief bent, radiating that aura of energy and joy in life which had struck him so forcefully the first time he saw her.

He laughed.

"Promise me that I may visit you," he said in a low, soft, caressing voice.

"Certainly not."

She was beating back the soft cadences of his voice by forcing her own to harshness.

"Do!"

Her eyes became inscrutable. This stirring young man was making the most inexplicable inroads upon her self-possession and calm. She sought refuge in coquetry, and the subtle challenge conveyed in her manner made her beautiful face lovelier than ever.

"Why do you want to visit me? So you can continue your lecture on my conduct and help me overcome my selfishness?"

"Vanity, vanity," he said, coolly. "I had no idea you were so vain."

"Selfish and vain! I wonder, sir, that you think so weak a creature worth bothering with at all."

"Oh, you are worth saving."

"Saving!" His audacity took her breath away, but there was laughter in her eyes.

"From the quagmire of all your vices," he said, wickedly.

"What a malevolent thing you are," she said. She was fairly scintillating with suppressed mischief.

"And you seemed such an innocuous, harmless, wholesome, good-sort-of-a-creature at first!"

"Horrors!" he exclaimed, "innocuous, harmless, wholesome, good-sort-of-a-*creature!*"

She laughed. Her roguishness was delightful.

"What other vices have you noticed in me?" she demanded. "Will you have the courage to enumerate them after my subtle flattery of yourself?"

"Wasp," he said, "wasp. I'll have to study you more at leisure before I can further diagnose your case."

"Let me inform you, high and mighty sir, that you are wasting your time."

"That is something I never do."

"In my case, then, you are establishing a precedent. You have told me that I am vain and selfish, and you have called me a wasp. Oh, no, really, I cannot let you call on me." She laughed. "I must protect myself against having anything further to do with you. For, stern mentor, you have been blinded by some quality in me—I cannot guess what—to pay me a compliment on one occasion, and, if you were ever to pay me another, it might be too much for me, coming from you."

"I paid you a compliment on two occasions."

"One," she said, firmly.

"Two," he insisted.

"Possibly," she admitted, sweetly. "I keep no diary and my memory is rather weak where unimportant events are concerned."

"Two," he said, "it was two."

"How the paying of them must have hurt you," she said, laughter and mischief alight in her eyes, "to make you remember them all this time."

Both laughed in sheer enjoyment of the situation. His eyes were sinking themselves into hers, and she, all unconsciously, was allowing his gaze to hold and caress her.

"Well, have you paid me back now?" he asked.

"For calling me a wasp? Or for——"

She broke off, and they both listened to the sound of the front door opening and closing again. The voices of the Chalmers were in the hall and almost immediately they heard the quick, light step of Amy Chalmers pattering down the marble-paved corridor in their direction. Probably she was bound for the music-room, which lay back of the library, in which they were standing. To

reach it she had to pass the open door near which stood Matthew Ferguson and Doris, with a glow in their cheeks and a light in their eyes which allowed of no misinterpretation.

Matthew Ferguson stepped forward quickly and closed the door. It creaked ever so lightly and, looking up, he saw that the apprehension which he felt was mirrored in Doris's face. There was one chance in a hundred that Amy was coming to the library for a book, and that hundredth chance was making cowards of them both.

Amy pattered past the door, however, and a few minutes later they heard her at the piano.

Doris and Matthew turned and looked at each other. Their eyes met, and in them was an expression of guilt. Neither could have analyzed the feeling, but the mere fact that they had stood together, behind a closed door, fearful of discovery, had engendered in them a feeling of shame and of guilt. It seemed to Matthew that this feeling, which proved strangely agreeable to him, bound them together.

"You will let me visit you, won't you," he said as she opened the door, "just once in a while?"

A quick change had come over her during the moment in which he had turned from her to open the door. All the radiance and joy seemed to have flickered out of her face, as a candle is snuffed out. But she was not the limp, pitiable girl who had sought to warm her fingers against the blaze of the fire upon coming indoors. Some vigor or energy had infused itself in her and, that she was bending it at the moment, to hark back to the past, did not impair this vigor or energy by one jot or tittle. If she was less pathetic than before, she was infinitely more tragic. And she was wholly superb.

Fairly breathing hostility she cried: "I wonder why I do not hate you! You have made me hate myself."

## CHAPTER XII

### *Matthew Ferguson Plays at Being Machiavelli*

On the whole Mr. Ferguson was not displeased by Doris's singular exit. It was, of course, due to the conflict that was raging in her heart, and he was quite content to know that the conflict stage had been reached so quickly.

He bethought himself of the Chalmers. He had made little progress in the direction of unmasking Colonel "Perepperept," and he realized fully that there was one way, and one only, of worming himself into the old scoundrel's confidence.

And yet, in spite of the reputation Tommy Burbridge had given Amy, Matthew Ferguson still hesitated "to play fast and loose" with that siren's affections. So deep-rooted was his respect for women that he could not wholly rid himself of the feeling that Amy, because she was a woman, was entitled to the kindness, protection, generosity of every man who was truly a man.

He cursed himself for his dilatoriness. He knew that he was wasting precious time unwarrantably, and yet he hesitated, temporized and procrastinated.

He was sitting in the office, trying to attain sufficient courage to take some decisive step which would evoke the Colonel's confidence, when Hopkins came in and began dusting the room. As this was an office which

fell to James, it was remarkable enough to arouse Matthew's curiosity, and his astonishment increased when he heard Hopkins speak quite audibly, but addressing himself, apparently, to the ceiling.

"Queer old party—Colonel Perepperept—what could he have meant?"

"To whom are you talking, Hopkins?" inquired Matthew.

"To myself, sir," replied the butler. "I've noticed, sir, that others don't find me an undesirable party to talk to, so when I get lonesome or puzzled, sir, as I am at present, I just thresh it out with myself, and, begging your pardon, sir, I don't find it a bad plan." And, without paying any further attention to Matthew, who sat laughing quietly, the old butler continued.

"'Delilah was not so slow,'" he says. "'Rope your Samson fast, my girl; make him safe—safe and 'armless.' That's what he says, but the question is, what does he mean? Curious old party—Colonel Perepperept."

And immediately afterwards, though he had dusted only three legs of the table, which did not require dusting at all, Hopkins withdrew. Matthew, into whose heart the iron had entered at last, did not know which to admire the more—the old servant's intelligence in realizing that his knowledge was important to Matthew, or his discretion in imparting it.

He went downstairs in search of Amy. She was not on the lower floor, and her wrap was not in the hall. So, putting on his overcoat, for the late afternoon was raw and damp, he made off in the direction of the Pavilion, near which was a small observatory that was a favorite resting place of Amy's. It was semi-enclosed and was fitted up with rattan chairs, tables, and benches. As he approached this rustic house, Amy's falsetto voice twittered:

"What's bringing you here, Mr. French?"

"Dear Miss Chalmers—curiosity as to where you have been keeping yourself all afternoon."

"Oh, isn't that lovely. You do miss me, don't you, when I'm not about?"

"Do I?"

She clapped her hands to show she was pleased and made room for him beside her on the rattan couch. As he sat down he reflected that neither of his statements had been untrue, and that he was becoming adept at a game which he had always held to be the most contemptible in which a man can engage.

"The end justifies the means," he told himself as he sat down beside her and took the two little hands which she stretched out to him. She wore a white coat, trimmed with pale blue and black braid, and a bonnet of white straw, trimmed with pink and light blue rosebuds, and lined with pink and white shirred silk, under which her silly, pretty little face looked unusually winsome. Adventuress, decoy, conspirator that he knew her to be, his heart smote him for his duplicity.

"I suppose it is really perfectly horrid of me to let you guess that I like you," she pouted.

"It's very kind of you," he said.

"I don't see why you say 'kind,'" she murmured.

"Oh, I suppose because after all I am just an employee of your cousin's."

"I see." She tried to put on an innocently wise, sly air. Her beady little black eyes glanced lingeringly over his face. There was appraisal in that glance. "Do you mean that on that account you wouldn't have let me see first that you cared—I mean—just liked me a little?"

"Didn't I let you see it first?" he inquired, protestingly.

Her pace was a little quicker than he had anticipated and it lifted a load from his conscience to realize that

her activity allowed him to assume a purely passive rôle. All he need do was not to repulse her advances. He felt that fate had been good to him once more. He would have hated horribly to play an actively deceptive part, even with this decoy and adventuress. "Oh, dear, you are awfully nice to put it that way," said Amy, "because, you see—no, really—I cannot tell even you that." She writhed and twisted incessantly as she spoke.

"Do tell me," he said.

"Oh, no, I mustn't."

"You know you want to."

"Ah, yes, I do."

"Then—be a good girl and tell me."

"I'd be a very bad, naughty little girl to tell."

"I cannot believe that."

"But I would. I'd be disobeying Pah-Pah."

He wondered at her colossal *sang-froid*.

"You make me more eager than ever," he said, carelessly.

"Eager, really eager?" she demanded.

"Yes," he said, coolly, "eager. Don't you see that what interests you interests me?"

"Oh, I will tell you, now." She looked at him adoringly. "Pah-Pah has been so cross with me—" Like a kitten she snuggled up to his shoulder, as close as the propriety which governs a chaste maiden's conduct permitted, "on your account."

"On my account?" he feigned amazement.

"Mm." Again the innocently wise, sly look. "Pah-Pah says I have been too forward with you. Entirely."

"Why didn't you put the blame on me?"

She began to simper.

"How could I?" Matthew would have vowed that he saw a tear glisten in her eye, and he wondered cynically

just how she managed to produce her stage-tears at the psychological moment.

"How could—I—know," she sobbed, "that you meant —all—you said?"

Most of the "saying" had been done by herself, Matthew reflected with grim satisfaction. He wondered whether it was unavoidably necessary to put his arm about the waist which, he felt certain, was awaiting that blandishment. He decided that it was not necessary.

"Of course I meant everything," he declared.

Fortunately for him, Miss Chalmers continued to play the active part in this curious love scene. His arm was lying on the railing of the rustic house, immediately back of her, and, deftly, Miss Chalmers propelled herself into that arm's circle. The impact of her shoulder swung it downward and he allowed it to remain in that position—half circling her shoulder. Thereupon Miss Chalmers looked up into his face, inquiringly:

"Then are we really engaged?"

Matthew stammered something, stammered quite as stupidly as if he had indeed been the victim of a "roping." For the time being his sensations were closely akin to a victim's, for he was utterly bewildered by the aggressiveness of the little adventuress. He had expected more finesse and polish of her, at any rate.

"What will Pah-Pah say?" questioned she, coyly.

"Yes," Matthew echoed grimly, "what will he say?"

"I believe my naughty boy is afraid of my Pah-Pah! How absurd of you!" She uttered one of her odd little cries. "Ah, there he is now!" And, springing up, she caught hold of Matthew's hand and was for running off with him to meet her parent.

"Miss Chalmers—one moment—I am not prepared to face your father—really—I cannot. I would make a blithering idiot of myself."

"My poor boy is so frightened, is he?"

"I suppose it is natural," he faltered.

He had, in fact, seen the flutter of a woman's skirts among the wild raspberry and blackberry shrubs which filled up the interstices of a wood of old hemlock and young chestnut trees, and he felt sick with fear as the thought occurred to him that Doris, because of her nervous mood, might have broken her habit of seclusion and gone for a walk. What if Doris, standing in the shelter of that witch-hazel bush, had seen and heard all?

He became aware that Amy had laid a kiss upon his cheek—a kiss which made him flame to the roots of his hair with embarrassment. She explained that she would go herself and tell her father what had happened. Then, by the way he would take the news he would see what an awfully sweet dear he could be. And off she went, running along the circling, sloping hill path to meet her parent.

Matthew sat very still. He wondered whether to remain where he was, in expectation that Doris, if it was indeed she who lurked behind the bush, would disclose herself to him, or whether it would be wiser to attempt to find her among the medley of pines, shrubs, and trailers that encumbered the woods.

Craning his neck, he saw that Amy and the Colonel had halted and were standing some distance away. What should he do? He heard Amy's falsetto voice, then heard it die away, and, craning his neck a little further, he saw that the Colonel had seated himself upon a bench. Matthew drew back to the shelter of the rustic house, and a moment later Mrs. Pultney-Greene stepped into view from the woods.

Matthew rose and went to meet her.

"You have given me the fright of my life," he told

her. Only then did he glance at her face, which, he was surprised to see, was dark with anger.

"Mr. Ferguson," she said, "you have hoodwinked me long enough. I have been your dupe, but I am your dupe no longer. Your double game is ended."

"What on earth do you mean?" Matthew demanded.

"Precisely what I say. Whether you came here as the Colonel's agent, or whether he won you to his sinister conspiracy after your coming, I do not know. But I am certain, in view of what passed a minute ago between you and that vixen, that you have been guilty of unbelievable duplicity."

"I have been guilty of duplicity, but the duplicity was directed against the Chalmers, not against Doris Diberto," said Matthew hotly. "You have seen, again and again, how Amy Chalmers literally threw herself at my head. I have kept you informed, as closely as I could, of my every movement, and I cannot understand why you should doubt my fidelity now."

"I saw what I saw," said the lady, angrily. "You engaged yourself to that snake a minute ago——"

"Pardon me," Matthew interrupted her, "she did the engaging."

"You engaged yourself to her, I say, ostensibly to serve Doris. Do you intend marrying that spiteful little cat in continuance of your knight-errant's service?"

Matthew was very angry.

"I wish you had heard all that passed between Amy Chalmers and myself," he said, bitingly. "I have told you right along that the Colonel is using her as a decoy, hoping, through her, to make me his tool. I entreat you, Mrs. Pultney-Greene, not to allow your unreasonable mistrust of me to spoil all my scheming and planning at the eleventh hour. I am convinced that within twelve hours, perhaps earlier, I will have the entire scheme of

the Colonel, as he intends working it, in my possession. The task of making myself agreeable to that disgusting little adventuress was the most disagreeable undertaking I have ever essayed. But I did it, realizing that in no other way could I gain her father's confidence."

"I do not believe a word you say," said she.

"You must believe me," he said desperately. "A spy's rôle is never an heroic one. And, much as I love Doris, I doubt if I could have brought myself to flirt with another woman for her sake in order to gain a confidence, if the woman in question had not been an unscrupulous adventuress and decoy."

"Hard terms—even for Amy Chalmers."

"But perfectly deserved." And he told her the facts which Tommy had sent him, and which, owing to Mrs. Parsons's presence, he had been unable to communicate to her.

"Give me a day more," he begged. "I am certain I will know all we need to know in that time. And then——"

"Then?" she asked quickly.

"Then I will speak to Doris and lay the entire villainy before her. You realize what a time I am going to have telling her. Oh, you simply must trust me."

She looked at him searchingly, but did not reply.

"In your heart of hearts you know I am true as steel," he said, passionately. "Your nerves are playing you a trick. You have been under a strain too long. I implore you, do nothing to undermine my work for one day more."

Still she hesitated, and he resumed his pleading.

"You have seen me for a fortnight at close range. Ask yourself the question and answer it honestly, 'Did I appear in any way to be a rogue?' Think what an utterly unprincipled villain I would be to betray Doris."

"I do not believe," she said slowly, speaking at last, "that any man with your public record can be such a knave as you would be if you were lying to me now."

"Thank God," said Matthew Ferguson under his breath. He felt an hysterical desire to laugh. It was so amazing that that monument of insincerity and time-serving—his public record—should again he taken as an earnest of his sincerity. But he felt no shame with the amusement. His career, scientific egoism plus applied philanthropy, seemed agglutinations of an alien world.

Looking up, he saw the Colonel swinging along, leanly erect and full of purpose.

"Could he have heard us?" Mrs. Pultney-Greene demanded, and her alarm was the best security he could have asked of her restored confidence in him.

"Impossible. The wind is in our direction." One of his sudden inspirations came to him. The verbal struggle with Mrs. Pultney-Greene had buoyed him up, as any altercation invariably did. He thought of Doris—how she had spoken of his being so intensely alive. He was burningly, stingingly alive now, with a sense of his own intellectual supremacy and invulnerableness. He was sure of a complete victory. One of his dominating moods, in which he was not afraid to measure himself against any man, had descended upon him.

"Mrs. Pultney-Greene," he said, "I wish you would do this. Turn your face toward me and pretend you are very angry. Say a few cruelly sharp words and then leave me. Walk away in any direction you choose. But look angry, as angry as you felt before."

The words were couched as an entreaty, but his manner was as authoritative as if he were issuing a command. The spell of his personality was so potent that she played the part he assigned her exactly as he wished her to play

it, played it, in fact, as if he were infusing his spirit into hers.

With an air of magnificent disdain she hurled a few words of vague disapproval at him and walked off, straight past the Colonel, who saluted her with a magnificent bow.

Out of a corner of his eye Matthew perceived that the Colonel was alone.

"Mr. French!"

"Colonel Chalmers!"

The Colonel leaned against the lintel of the door post and placidly surveyed the other.

"What's wrong?" he inquired. "Both you and the lady seem slightly out of temper."

"I'll tell you what is the matter, sir," said Matthew, doggedly. "Mrs. Pultney-Greene has played eavesdropper. She overheard part of a conversation between Miss Chalmers and myself, and she seemed to think, nor did she hesitate to voice her thoughts in offensive language that, as an employee, I had entirely forgotten the difference in social status existing between Miss Chalmers and myself."

"Why," said the Colonel, delightfully sincere for once, "Mrs. Pultney-Greene is nothing but an employee herself."

"Sir!" said Matthew, rolling the monosyllable ominously.

The Colonel flushed furiously and adroitly set about to retrieve his mistake. But it is the unconsidered phrase that illuminates character and Matthew felt a delicious satisfaction at this new token of the Colonel's deceitfulness.

"There are, of course, employees and employees," said the Colonel. "Take yourself, my dear fellow. You have

blood in your veins, I am certain, which vies with the best in the country."

"I thank you, sir," said Matthew, punctiliously. "I confess I was made so indignant by the treatment accorded me by Mrs. Pultney-Greene that I was on the point of packing my trunk and leaving this very evening?"

"Oh," said the Colonel, taken aback, "I wouldn't do that. Unless you have something very much better in view."

Matthew exhibited a judicious agitation.

"Do you really think, Colonel, that this is a position a man of my qualifications ought to be content to hold for any length of time?"

"I'm sure it's not," said the Colonel heartily. "Not under prevalent conditions."

"Prevalent conditions?" Matthew asked. "What do you mean, Colonel? I beg your pardon, sir. Perhaps I should not ask. But you can imagine, sir, that after my talk with Miss Chalmers—I mean, owing to the regard in which I hold her—I mean, sir, in view—in short, sir—thought of the future—as you will comprehend—that is, if you sanction——"

Matthew, having adroitly run himself into this exquisite labyrinth of words, came to a dead stop, evincing all symptoms of the young lover too embarrassed by his feelings to find adequate expression for them.

"Your emotion does you credit, Mr. French," the Colonel said, cordially. "My daughter has informed me of what has passed."

"And do I understand——"

"My dear young man!" The Colonel cleared his throat. "My daughter is a Chalmers, of Chalmersville, Virginia!" His right hand, shooting upward, spread its fingers in approved peacock tail fashion. "I am no snob,

suh, far from it, and I know worth when I see it. However, to promise the hand of my daughter in marriage to a young man whom I have known for a fortnight only——"

"I honor you for making the objection, sir," said Matthew Ferguson.

"Ah—well spoken!" shouted the Colonel and slapped Matthew on the shoulder. Then, he confidentially linked his arm in Matthew's.

"What if my objection is a matter of form rather than a bona fide objection. Eh, suh? What then?"

Matthew pretended to be overcome by this token of magnanimity.

"Colonel Chalmers!" he contrived to whisper.

"Come now, come now!" The Colonel affectionately passed his arm about Matthew's shoulder. "Now we understand each other. Eh, suh? Appearances must be maintained, eh, suh? Come now, come now, confide your difficulties to me."

"You sly old fox," thought Matthew.

"My remaining here so long, Colonel Chalmers," he said, "was due to the presence of a young lady whom I need not specify by name."

"I comprehend," murmured the Colonel.

"The devil you do!" thought Matthew.

"But now, sir, after what has occurred, I do not believe I will stay here any longer. No, decidedly, I will not stay any longer. Every day that I remain here is a day wasted, and the poor young man, sir, had better waste his pennies than waste his time."

"Hum," said the Colonel, thoughtfully. "Between you and me, my young friend, you had better stay."

"There is no future here," said Matthew.

"There is a future here," retorted the Colonel. "It has seemed to me, Mr. French, from what I have seen

of you, that you are a very well informed young man; that you are, indeed, a remarkably well informed young man. I might go so far as to say that you are an extraordinarily well informed young man. You have a fine grasp of business ideas—conditions—all that sort of thing. You came here, I suppose, well recommended, or Mrs. Pultney-Greene would hardly have looked to you to help her straighten out the chaos into which my poor niece's affairs have lapsed."

Matthew decided to play his trump card, without a vestige of fear that it might prove a boomerang. The situation even afforded him a delicious amusement. He reflected that a knave, when he wants to use an honest man, almost invariably confounds honesty with stupidity.

"I came here," he said, "recommended by no less a person than Adam Cravatt, the railroad president, you know, who, I am happy to say, knows my ability and has tested it."

The Colonel pulled vigorously at a stogie he had lighted while Matthew was speaking. Evidently he was trying to determine just how far it would be wise to take this well-recommended, competent young man into his confidence. He remained silent for so long a time, evidently in fear that he might commit himself too far, that Matthew decided to take the bull by the horns.

"You see, Colonel," he said, "I wasn't very well when I came here, or I wouldn't have come at all. Of course, under able management, there would be a future here, and a very good future at that, for a man who has my knowledge of affairs in general. But then—poor Mrs. Diberto—it is very pitiable, sir—I really ought to say no more."

"My dear fellow!" The Colonel pommeled Matthew's back energetically, thereby punctuating his kindly sentiments for the young man. "You have brought the con-

versation to a point which, suh, I would have avoided if it were possible to do so, actuated by a false delicacy. False delicacy, Mr. Ferguson, for delicacy may be false, suh, and, as I always say, suh, we must dew our dooty, no matter how hard."

Matthew wagged his head with every semblance of profound sorrow.

"To do your duty in this instance, sir, will be very hard indeed, I am afraid."

"You apprehend me!" cried the Colonel. "I perceive with delight, my young friend, that you apprehend me perfectly."

"Perfectly," said Matthew Ferguson, drily.

The Colonel again encircled Matthew with his arm and, in this affectionate posture, continued his remarks.

"You see, Mr. French, between you and me, suh, it is only out of regard for my niece's poor mother, for Mrs. Parsons, whom I greatly honor, and for whom, perhaps, I entertain a more tender regard than in your eyes may be compatible with my gray hairs; it is only out of regard for that excellent woman, Mr. French, that I have abstained so far from taking decisive steps in the matter. Do you get me?"

"I do, sir."

"The condition of the affairs of the estate you are acquainted with. I ask you, would any sane woman deliberately allow things to run to seed so unconscionably?"

"It is a question I would not like to see any jury decide if I had an interest in the lady," said Matthew, truthfully.

"Exactly. I perceive, Mr. French, that you apprehend me perfectly, indeed. But, my dear fellow, there are other things of which you cannot possibly have cognizance. The situation here, suh, is an incomparable imbroglio. My poor niece, suh, indulges in a perfect orgy

of grief nightly in her rooms. An incomparable imbroglio, I assure you, suh." The Colonel's diction, Mr. Ferguson noted, soared as his sorrow mounted. "Beyond peradventure of a doubt, an inquest in lunacy would establish the fact that the poor girl is——" The Colonel made an expressive gesture with his hand.

"It's very, very sad," said Matthew, dispassionately. "Such a handsome woman, too." Perfunctoriness could go no further.

"Very sad, very," echoed the Colonel. "But what else is there for me to do, Mr. French?"

"I am sure, sir, I do not know," conceded Matthew.

"We came here, Amy and myself, in the vagrant hope of diverting poor Doris. We sit here in this unspeakably dull place," with one of his spacious gestures the Colonel indicated the exquisitely kept grounds, with the distant view of meadowland and mountains shrouded in purplish mist; "we eat the bread of loneliness and sorrow"—Mr. Ferguson had a vision of the port and the canvas-back ducks which the Colonel consumed so generously—"because from day to day we hoped that her poor mind might still swing back to sanity; and that, emerging from her rooms, she might find cheerful and loving relatives to bear her company."

Matthew felt an unexampled rage burning within him. The Colonel's hand was pressing heavily on his shoulder and it was all he could do to restrain himself from shaking it off. Knavery, villainy he had expected to deal with, but hypocrisy of such virulence he was not prepared for. It required a strong effort of the will to continue his rôle.

"You are acting nobly, Colonel Chalmers," he said.

"I hope always to dew my dooty," responded the Colonel, oozing satisfaction. "I despair now of saving

her reason, unless heroic measure are taken. I have consulted with a specialist—did you speak?"

Matthew had, indeed, made an inarticulate sound of rage. He laughed, and spoke conciliatorily.

"I beg pardon. Something, an insect, got into my throat and tickled me."

"Is it out?" the Colonel inquired solicitously.

"Yes, thank you. You consulted a specialist, you were saying——"

"Yes." The Colonel mentioned the name of a physician known by those "on the inside" to have perjured himself in more than one lunacy inquest. "I have also consulted with a lawyer, a Mr. Knox, of whom you may have heard."

"I am afraid I haven't," said Matthew. But he had, and his heart burned with indignation as he realized how securely the Colonel had woven the net which was to rob Doris of her liberty.

"He also considers the course I intend to pursue, as soon as poor Mrs. Parsons passes away, as the only justifiable one."

"Is Mrs. Parsons really a sick woman?"

"A very sick woman. And, in fairness to my poor niece, I must place her in the proper hands as soon as possible, so that an attempt may be made to restore her reason, for I cannot believe, my dear Mr. French, that her case is hopeless. I believe her sanity may yet be restored and, in that happy event, I am determined that, on being discharged as cured, she shall find her fortune intact."

"Colonel," Mr. Ferguson forced himself to say, "you are acting nobly, nobly, sir."

The Colonel fell to smoking vigorously.

"You will now perceive, my young friend, why I counsel you to stay on. I am an old man, and I require an

alert, bright, intelligent young fellow like yourself to be my right hand in looking after this enormous estate. Your salary, of course, will be adequate, you know, to get married on."

Jocosely he jabbed Matthew in the ribs, and the young man felt an unholy desire to commit murder. Certainly this man was the most accomplished villain imaginable. In no way had he shown his real hand, though apparently speaking with utter candor. Not one word, one syllable had the old rogue uttered which, if repeated in court, would convict him of conspiracy against his niece. Every sentiment, apparently, was inspired by affection and real concern for "poor Doris."

Matthew cleared his throat.

"Of course, Colonel," he said, "I don't want poor Mrs. Parsons to die. But—I have got to think of myself. As man to man—how long is she likely to live?"

"Oh, the poor woman is in very bad condition—likely to go off at any moment," replied the Colonel, in the most hopeful voice imaginable. "She is as likely as not to die this very minute on the train," he added cheerfully. "At any rate, she will not live more than another year. In the meantime, do not waste your time. Familiarize yourself with all details."

"Do I understand, then, that in case of Mrs. Parsons's death——"

"Just that," said the Colonel. "Immediately after the interment I will take the necessary steps." The Colonel sighed. "Everything is in readiness—the specialist is engaged—the lawyer retained——"

"And the asylum selected, you detestable old scamp," thought Matthew.

"It may not be wise to act immediately afterwards, Colonel," he said, "if you do not mind my making a suggestion."

"Mr. Knox said the same thing."

"You see," Matthew continued, "it would look better if, after the interment, you were to come back here and make new efforts to—ahem—to win Mrs. Diberto back to normal life. One must be careful, very careful, with these lunacy inquests. Do you see the point? The second blow, coming on top of the first grief, was too much for her. You try to suppress the sad fact, even to yourself. You try to keep it from her immediate circle. But, finally, actuated by the desire to protect her against herself from squandering her fortune, you take the requisite steps. And, last of all, we must not let out anything about Miss Chalmers and myself. You see that, don't you? Otherwise, conspiracy might be charged by the Pultney-Greene woman."

The Colonel removed his arm from Matthew's shoulder and smoked with a violence that was almost vicious.

"French," he said, in a low, business-like voice, "you are going to be invaluable. As you and Knox agree on waiting some time after Mrs. Parsons's decease, I'll wait say for three or four months. That long enough?"

"Three months will do," said Matthew Ferguson, keeping elation out of his voice.

"Very good. That, then, is settled. I'll have to let Knox know. Now about the Pultney-Greene woman—I mean—about her having seen you and Amy?"

"That's up to you. Pretend you are furious with me. You rowed me in first-rate style, you know. Call me an impudent, upstart puppy, and tell her that if you had your way you'd throw me out bodily. Something to that effect, you know, because the overt enmity between you and herself will make her keen to retain me in order to vex you. See?"

The Colonel chuckled odiously.

"You are invaluable, indeed," he said.

It was destined, however, that the Colonel was not to speak to Mrs. Pultney-Greene of the contempt in which he held Montrose French for, as they arose from the table that evening, Hopkins entered with the information that someone desired to speak to the Colonel by Long Distance Telephone. Laughing and joking, the Colonel left the room. When he returned five minutes later, he looked ceremonious and grave.

"It has happened, Mrs. Pultney-Greene," he said, in sepulchral tones. "That which we have feared so long for poor Doris's sake has happened."

White and trembling, Mrs. Pultney-Greene rose from the table.

"Do you mean that——"

"Mrs. Parsons, yes." The Colonel spoke in heavy, pompous, oratorical way. "She reached New York at five o'clock, drove to the boarding-house at which she always stayed when in the metropolis, and was taken ill almost immediately. Before the physician who was summoned arrived, all was over."

Amy began to weep. Matthew again wondered at her facility in producing her stage-tears upon requirement. He really felt an enormous curiosity as to the mechanism of those tears. Then he reflected that in this instance, at least, he probably did her an injustice. It was likely that in her own silly, flaccid way she had been fond of her Aunt Parsons.

"Poor Doris," said Mrs. Pultney-Greene, and sank back into her chair.

Poor Doris, indeed!

He felt intensely grateful that he had obtained a three months' respite. It was manifestly impossible to tell her at this moment of the Colonel's unparalleled villainy. And yet, if he had lacked the foresight to obtain that

three months' respite, he would have had to compass the impossible.

"How I dread telling her," said Mrs. Pultney-Greene.

"Shall I?" volunteered the Colonel.

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Pultney-Greene's voice was unconsciously contemptuous. She rose and went from the room.

The Colonel suggested that they repair to the library and, a half hour later, Mrs. Pultney-Greene came into the room with Doris, who looked very white and ethereal. Matthew noticed that Doris's eyes were red from weeping.

Amy sprang up and embraced her. Doris submitted stonily to that embrace, but, when the Colonel offered to kiss her, she drew back.

"Pardon, uncle," she said, "I cannot bear to be kissed."

The Colonel paid no heed to the rebuff.

"This is a very shocking business, my dear," he said.

"It is terrible," said Doris, "to think we parted from her less than eight hours ago."

"And by a curious coincidence, my dear," continued the Colonel, "just at the time when your poor mother died, my poor Doris, I was telling Mr. French how very ill your mother was."

Matthew Ferguson wondered whether a man can become hysterical. The Colonel's attempt at commiseration filled him with an insane desire to laugh. And yet he would have felt the solemnity of the occasion, even if it had not concerned Doris so closely. Like all sudden deaths, Mrs. Parsons's demise had invested the foolish, trivial little woman with a certain glamour of tragedy, bestowing upon her a dignity which she had sadly lacked in life.

"I want Mother's body brought here," Doris said. She announced her intention of going to New York herself.

The Colonel demurred, so did Mrs. Pultney-Greene, and Amy joined the chorus.

"Dear Doris, I am sure Pah-Pah and Mrs. Pultney-Greene are right; you know they will put your mother in the baggage-car, among the trunks and luggage and things, where you cannot possibly sit, and you won't be satisfied to go into the sleeper."

Doris shivered.

"Amy, my child," the Colonel said, rebukingly, "it was not necessary to qualify. The details were unnecessary."

Amy was about to retort when Matthew interrupted her.

"I beg to add my entreaties to those made by your uncle and cousin and friend," he said. "You ought not to go on this errand at all."

Doris rose from her chair.

"Since you all think that the Colonel alone should go, and since he has kindly offered to go, I will do as you say. Uncle, you will need money. I will make out a check and send it down to you."

"May I come for it?" Matthew asked quickly.

"If you will." She preceded him from the room.

He did not remember that she had had a quarrel with him until he found himself walking beside her up the broad, wide stairway. He decided, wisely, to ignore the incident completely.

He had not been in her suite of rooms before, and she took him into them by a tiny private hall-way, and he had the odd sensation of a new intimacy with her as he stood near the escritoire, where she sat, writing. He felt a sense of possession, of proprietorship, in standing beside her. And suddenly it came to him that there comes a time in the life of everyone when that person must struggle alone through the valley of tears. And

now, instead of seeming to belong to him, she seemed far removed from his sphere.

She gave him the check.

"Mr. French, will you do something very particular for me?"

Eagerly he signified his willingness.

"Get my cousin to accompany her father. You are so clever that I am sure you can manage it. I want to be alone in the house—without them—for a little while."

"I will try," he said, a little dubiously.

"You can, I am sure." She hesitated a moment, and then spoke bitterly.

"If the Chalmers had been less persistent in interposing themselves between my mother and myself that shadow of an estrangement which divided us at the last might never have existed."

"I will try to think of some way to get Miss Chalmers to go," he said again, then waited, hoping that some inspiration might come to him before he left her room.

"Mr. French," Doris said, "I have something to say to you that will please you. I have thought a good deal about the things you said to me in the garden the last time we took a walk together. I think perhaps you are right. Perhaps my husband's violent death has made me see things in an unhealthy way."

He said nothing, because he feared to say the wrong thing.

"If only the Chalmers were out of the way," she said, "I would take a long walk every morning, and enjoy my garden. I have been alone, indoors, too much. I am sure that it would be a great help to me to walk every morning with you—with you or Mrs. Pultney-Greene."

She had added the name of her companion only as a matter of decorum, as he saw with delight. He felt a wild desire to tell her then and there of the Colonel's

roguery, but reason prevailed. There must be preparation.

"I think I have hit upon a scheme of ridding you forever of the Chalmers," he said.

"Oh, if you could! How? In what way? Oh, no, do not answer me." She rose and stood with her face buried in her hands, her lithe figure swaying gently to and fro.

"This is wicked of me," she said. "My mother lies dead in New York and I am decrying the man who has offered to go and bring her home to me."

"Your antipathy to the Colonel," Matthew said, circumspectly, "is not unfounded. Any kindness he shows you he shows from motives of self-advancement. That you know."

"Do you really think so?" Her hands came away from her face and she looked at him eagerly, hungrily, as if greedy for any intelligence that would justify her dislike of the Chalmers.

"I am sure of it," he said.

"Lately, I do not know how to account for it, but I have had such a fear and such a dread of my uncle."

"You are very nervous, especially to-night," said Matthew, soothingly. "In a few days you and I must have a long talk. I have many things to tell you, but to-night is not the time."

"No," she said, "to-night is not the time."

Was he wise in postponing that which, inevitably, within a very few days, he must tell her? She looked so delicately fragile and ill that he felt there was danger of precipitating the very catastrophe, the very aberration of which the Colonel purposed to accuse her, if he spoke to her at this moment of the ghastly conspiracy afoot against her.

He was intensely nervous, and it seemed to him that

his heart was in the grasp of powerful fingers that pressed and crushed until the pain of their icy, cruel touch brought the tears to his eyes, and to his unutterable dismay he found himself looking at her through a shining veil of moisture.

"Are you crying for me?" she asked, pity in her voice.

"I am ashamed of myself," he said.

He felt her hand against his coat sleeve.

"What a friend you are," she said softly.

It was ignominious to have made such an exhibition of himself, for tears had always seemed to him to stamp a man as ridiculous, as lacking in self-control and strength. The contempt he felt for himself was illimitable. What right had he to break down at a moment when he should have been her bulwark and her staff? But suddenly, while he was still striving to regain his self-control, he looked into the sweet face upturned to his and he realized that, far from hurting or exciting Doris, the token he had unwillingly given of his tenderness was strengthening and quieting her. It was he that needed strengthening, strange to say. He caught her hands in his and reverently lifted them to his lips.

When he released them he saw that there was a divine smile on her lips and in her eyes.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Mr. Ferguson Achieves the First Rung of the Ladder Leading to the Enchanted Kingdom*

Mr. Ferguson had little difficulty in persuading the Colonel to allow Amy to accompany him to New York. Amy herself was anxious to go in order to get the right sort of mourning, and the Colonel wanted her to stay at the Manor, so that Doris might know that her only remaining kinswoman was in the house with her. They were quarreling violently about this when Matthew returned to the library with the check. With his advent their tone changed immediately to mild filial entreaty on the one hand and gentle parental insistence upon authority on the other.

It was an edifying spectacle, and Matthew could scarcely conceal his contempt. But he thought of Doris, gritted his teeth, and prepared to play the farce to its bitter finish.

"If you don't mind my saying so, Colonel," Matthew began, "I think Amy—Miss Chalmers—is right in desiring to go with you. She cannot get proper clothes in St. Agnes-on-the-Falls, and naturally she wants the best, particularly as Mrs. Diberto's clothes are all so very *chic*."

"There, Pah-Pah! What a dear you are!" And she blew Matthew a kiss. He was thankful it was not bestowed in person.

The Colonel feebly remonstrated.

"But really, my dear French, propriety—you know—demands that she remain right here—with Doris."

"As to that, Colonel," Matthew raised his eyebrows in a manner eloquent of derogatory criticism on Doris, "Mrs. Diberto has already announced her intention of shutting herself up in her rooms."

"As if she doesn't always do just that," quoth Amy.

"Hush, my child," said the Colonel. "You may accompany me, if you wish."

"Oh!" crowed Amy, as delightedly as if the excursion had been a pleasure trip.

"And now, my dear, run away and get ready. I have one or two things to say to Mr. French."

Amy pranced away, and the Colonel, after closing the door behind her and trying it twice, came back to Mr. Ferguson.

"French," he said, "Doctor Hassler is in Baltimore at present, so, after all is over, I am going to plead important business of my own, which will take me to Virginia. That will give me a chance to see him and arrange all details. You see, I haven't put anything of all this in writing."

"To do so would have been the height of folly."

"I think I will take Amy with me. Her absence will strengthen my position, as indicated by you."

"That," said Matthew, "is an excellent plan. How long will you be gone?"

"A fortnight—three weeks. Knox is in Europe and does not get back until then."

Matthew's heart was sick within him. The cool perfidy of this man was unexampled. He said nothing and the Colonel resumed.

"It is just as well that I stay away so long, in view of your suggestion that after a short absence the abnor-

mal condition of my niece naturally would be more flagrantly noticeable. Then, also, Knox advised me, when I consulted with him, to have two specialists ready to testify, and I have decided to take his advice. I want Hassler to arrange that for me."

"I see," said Matthew.

Amy's voice was heard in the hall, and the Colonel, after shaking hands with Matthew, went to join her. In a few minutes they were out of the house and on their way to New York.

In spite of the relief of knowing that he practically controlled the situation, Matthew was intensely nervous. In his dreams, horrid possibilities came to disturb him. He dreamed of Doris incessantly, and invariably he dreamed of her as being in physical danger of some sort, from which he, at the last moment, miraculously saved her. Once only was he condemned to see her perish before his eyes in these nocturnal meanderings of his unstrung nerves. He dreamed that she had fallen into a deep well and, though he strained and pulled desperately at a rope to which she clung, he was unable to bring her to the surface. So vivid had been this terrible dream that he felt too ill to appear at the breakfast table the next morning.

Matthew's nerves were worn to a jagged edge by the time the interment was over, and the Chalmers were safely out of the house. The night following the departure of father and daugher, Matthew slept from nine in the evening until eight the next morning—slept the first sound, dreamless sleep in a week.

Doris appeared at the breakfast table the morning following the departure of her unwelcome guests, as a matter of course. Matthew saw in that return to the breakfast room a guarantee that she meant to keep her promise to avoid being alone as much as possible.

Her pallor was alarming that morning. Matthew thought he had never seen any living creature so white, and he was filled with a numb, despairing dread as he realized that, unavoidably, he must tell her what he had to tell within forty-eight hours.

After breakfast, Doris stood irresolutely at the long window that opened out upon the spacious, balustraded, unroofed terrace that ran along the front of the house.

"Do you wish to take a walk this morning?" he asked her.

"I feel very weak. I do not believe I am able to walk. But I would like to lie in a steamer chair out on the terrace, right there where the sun lies in a little golden pool."

He helped her out upon the terrace, brought her a pillow, wraps and a rug to cover her, and settled her comfortably in the chair. Doris, lying back in the chair, smiled luxuriously. She drew the rug, which was a really bright colored steamer blanket, close up to her chin, and then closed her eyes. Not a word had been spoken by either throughout, but it seemed to Matthew, as he sat down beside her, that this very absence of words marked the new intimacy between them.

He had never seen her in a recumbent position before; he had never seen her with eyes closed; and the novelty of seeing her thus, in complete repose, was an experience which made him throb with exquisite pleasure. Her wonderful complexion, shell pink and white, with the impalpable penumbra of gold that enmeshed her skin, had never shown to better advantage than now, for the sun, shining full upon her cheek, accentuated that golden film, giving her an almost seraphic appearance. Never before had she seemed so dear, so exquisitely, unfathomably dear to him as at this moment when her quiet acceptance of his service, her reliance upon his friendship,

the unconventional position in which she allowed him to see her, spoke eloquently of her faith and implicit belief in him.

So still and quiet she lay that he thought she was asleep. But suddenly she opened her eyes and looked straight at him, smiled and stretched out her hand to him.

"Do not grieve so for me. I will be all right in a few days. The absence of the 'Perepperepts' will help me." She smiled as she used Hopkins's favorite designation for the Chalmers. "I have done some serious thinking, Mr. French. Would you like to know what my thoughts are?"

He looked at her with kindling eyes. Doris withdrew her hand and continued, averting her own eyes quite suddenly, as if she feared that the fire in his might scorch her own.

"I have been thinking that anyone who has such good, staunch, true friends as you and Mrs. Pultney-Greene —and good old Hopkins, too—have shown yourselves to be has no right to drift as I have been drifting. So I am going to carry out fully the promise I made you the other day. I am going to live and get what I can out of life. Does that please you?"

"Please me!" he echoed, asininely, as he thought.

"And in return you must do what you promised to do—rid me of the 'Perepperepts.' What is your plan?"

"Dear Mrs. Diberto," Matthew said, very gently, "the plan is—well, it may excite you a little. Do you feel very strong just now?"

"Not particularly strong," she admitted.

"Then, I am going to ask you to rest a little longer before I tell you my story. And if you feel nervous and excitable all day to-day, we will postpone my tale till to-morrow. Do you agree?"

Doris smiled at him, deliciously submissive.

"I must do as you wish, I suppose," she said. "But I warn you—if I remain in this steamer chair much longer, without hearing the blood-curdling, stirring pirate yarn you have to tell, I shall go sound asleep."

"The very best thing you can do," said he.

Doris laughed, sighed, closed her eyes again and in a few minutes he had the satisfaction of noticing that her breath was coming rhythmically, slowly, with that unbroken monotony which proclaims sleep. An adorable look came over her face and, remembering that slumber is said to be retarded or interfered with if the look of a watcher is directed upon the closed eyelids of the sleeper, he averted his gaze. But again and again, as if a magnet were drawing him, he glanced at the exquisite face.

Ten minutes passed, a quarter of an hour went by, and still she slept. Then, without opening her eyes, her breath still coming so regularly that he would have vowed she was asleep, she stretched out her hand to him. He pressed it gently. She withdrew it and then spoke.

"I have slept beautifully. And now please do not refuse to tell me that stirring, wicked tale of yours."

"It is a wicked tale, indeed, and to you, at least, it will be a stirring one."

"Goodness, that sounds quite dreadful!"

In spite of her mockery he saw that she was prepared for an unusual revelation. She changed her position somewhat, as if bracing herself against something unusual.

"Mrs. Diberto," Matthew said, "your feeling of insecurity as regards your worthy uncle is well founded."

Doris became serious.

"Please go on," she said, "and do not fear to frighten me. I am quite strong now. I shall be very brave," she

smiled adorably, "because I have you to help me and stand by me."

"Mrs. Diberto, then you trust me?"

"Implicitly."

"Thank you. The Colonel——" Matthew stopped, then said brusquely: "He is plotting against you."

"Plotting?" she faltered.

"Yes. Mrs. Pultney-Greene mistrusted him for a long time. She told me of her dread and her fear. Then, I pretended to admire him, to be great friends with him. It was necessary, even, in order to win his confidence completely, to walk into the trap he had set for me. I refer to your cousin Amy's wiles. I pretended to fall captive to her charms."

Doris threw off the steamer blanket impetuously and sprang to her feet. Disdain, scorn, contempt blazed from her eyes.

"How could you!" she cried, and again, "How could you!"

"One moment, Mrs. Diberto!" Matthew also was on his feet, and speaking swiftly and impressively. He told her of the deliberation with which Amy had set out to capture him, of the Colonel's admonition to "rope" him, of Tommy's information. As he made his points, one by one, he saw Doris's anger diminishing rapidly.

"Forgive me," she said, when he finished, "I might have known that you would do nothing dishonorable."

Matthew resumed his narrative.

"Then, finally, when the Colonel thought that my infatuation made me 'safe,' I was able to get from him his entire scheme, which culminates in placing himself in possession of your fortune."

Doris went back to the steamer chair. She sat down on it and folded her hands across her knees.

"How does he propose to do that?" she asked, with knit brows.

"By committing a crime."

"He is heir to my fortune, under my husband's will—unless——" she blushed, and did not finish the sentence. "Surely, he does not intend murdering me?"

"No, the crime he contemplates is very different from murder. It is a peculiarly subtle crime, a crime which is sometimes reported by the papers as having been committed years before it received publicity. Unfortunately crimes of this nature are difficult to detect, the more so, as the very persons who commit them are those whom the law looks upon as the most trustworthy friends of the victim. Therefore, the public rarely hears of crimes of this sort, unless the victim contrives to regain liberty and means of livelihood."

Doris had listened to him with ever-increasing agitation.

" 'Regain liberty and means of livelihood'—you do not mean, surely you cannot mean——"

"Yes," said Matthew Ferguson, "that is what I do mean. It's rather unsavory, isn't it? And I can tell you, Mrs. Diberto, that I have never run across a more brilliantly conceived plan for committing an unexampled act of knavery."

"Please tell me all," she begged. "On what does he intend basing his charge?"

"In the first place, on the state into which you have allowed your financial affairs to fall."

"Would that count—I mean—would a jury—or a judge—consider that of consequence?"

"It would be considered of great importance at any inquest held."

"And on that charge alone?"

"There is another point which Colonel Chalmers in-

tends to make." Matthew felt it extremely difficult to continue. He was about to outrage Doris's sense of reticence, of delicacy, of decency almost. But, difficult as was the task, it had to be accomplished, and, after a brief pause, Matthew resumed.

"An inquest of lunacy," he began, "may be held in the neighborhood of the alleged lunatic's residence, or, under especial circumstances, if occasion requires, at the residence itself. In this case——"

"My case?"

"The Colonel and his lawyer and the two specialists he has engaged——"

Doris shivered, and seemed to shrink together. She put her hand to her throat, as if to quell some tumult that was rising in her. Matthew, pitying her intensely, interrupted his narrative to interpolate: "I told you it was a brilliantly conceived scheme!"

"Go on, go on," she said, "the sooner you get it over with the better."

"Well, the Colonel and his henchman, undoubtedly, would insist upon having the inquest held here on the premises, because the second and principal charge would have to be investigated right here."

Her lips moved, but no sound came. Terror was mirrored in her eyes, and her cheeks blanched. He dropped his eyes before that look of horror in her face. Pity and shame and agony almost paralyzed his powers of coherent thinking. He mercilessly urged himself to get through with the entire miserable story in order to curtail her suffering as much as possible.

"Hopkins," he said, "some time ago discovered a slit in the curtain which hangs on the circular passage of the rotunda in front of the French windows of your room—the room which you allow no one to enter."

"What do you mean? In Heaven's name, what can

you mean?" she demanded. She seemed like an animal at bay. It occurred to him for the first time that she might show anger, resentment, rancor.

"The Colonel himself cut that slit into the curtain——"

"He has spied on me?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Infamous! Dastardly!" she exclaimed, passionately. "And you—do you also know what—what the curtain was meant to screen?"

He bowed his head in acknowledgment, with a deference with which he might have done homage to a queen. The fine courtesy of that inclination of the head did not escape her, and suddenly the exquisite kindness, the high delicacy which he was showing her throughout must have dawned on her, for when she spoke again her voice had lost its accusatory timbre.

"Were you told, or did you—see?"

"Mrs. Pultney-Greene insisted that I must see for myself."

"So everybody knew!" she cried, indignantly. "My trusted friends, those whom I believed in most, spied on me?"

"Do not apply the word 'spied' to Mrs. Pultney-Greene's actions," he said with quiet authority, purposely eliminating himself from the discussion, as if he were entirely removed from the plane which might be brought down to the level of vulgar suspicion. "She acted solely for your good, and was actuated solely by thought of your interests. Let me tell you that it was very fortunate for you that Mrs. Pultney-Greene is the devoted, unswervable friend she is."

"I dare say I am ungrateful," Doris said, meekly. "Only, I will say this—why did she not speak to me?"

"Would speaking to you have done any good? Did you listen to her entreaties to desist from shutting your-

self up in your rooms as you were doing? The poor woman, in brief, was afraid."

"Afraid? Afraid of what? Of me? Did she think me mad, too? And you, do you think me insane?"

"Mrs. Diberto! I beg of you to control yourself!" he said coldly, commandingly.

He saw the delicate face move convulsively.

"Still," she said, "I do not see how the Colonel hoped to profit by having me declared insane."

"It is a presumption in law that the lunatic will be treated with more kindness and consideration, and that his or her affairs will be conducted with greater vigilance by the next of kin than by a stranger. As the Colonel is your sole surviving male relative, the estate would have passed into his care, especially as a prospective interest in property is allowed by the law to determine a request for guardianship."

"I would not have believed such a thing possible!" She spoke with energy, as he was happy to see, for he had feared that her resilience might be broken by the nervous shock conveyed by his revelation. "What is to be done? You were right when you said something might touch me some day. Oh, how right you were in all you said. What is to be done? I know you will forgive me for looking to you for guidance. I am so frightened and so shocked that I believe I could not, on my own initiative, do a thing to escape from that man."

"It's all very simple," he replied.

"For you!"

"And for you, dear lady. I have rid you of him for a fortnight by suggesting to him that after a brief absence he would be in better position to be struck by the change in your mental condition than if he remained here."

"Dear traitor!" With a spontaneous gesture, in which

there was something infinitely confiding, she put out her hand to him. He bent over the hand and kissed it before releasing it. And when he looked at her again he saw in her face the sunny radiance which he had seen there only twice before, on Midsummer Eve and the afternoon in the library. There was about her an alluring, nestling, ingratiating quality which he had never noticed before. Her eyes seemed bathed in some inner essence of the soul. And, as he looked at her and saw in her once more the embodiment of youth and beauty and love, he did not know what to admire more, the lofty beauty of her character that had made her peculiar conception of duty to her deceased husband possible, or the iron will-power that had executed that austere conception in the face of every instinct tending in the opposite direction. He understood fully, for the first time, the cruel self-repression she had practised in deliberately cutting herself off from all the multitudinous diversions that make life livable and desirable, and which, for a woman of her rich emotional capacity, must have bordered well-nigh on self-torture. He had a swift vision of cruel dreams, sleepless nights, and haunting memories.

"What am I to do?" she asked.

He spoke emphatically, for he expected her to rebel against this, his first mandate.

"A fortnight is a long time. It gives you a chance to make yourself over, as it were. First of all, you must dismantle that black chamber."

Her answer amazed him.

"I have already thought of doing so," she said.

"I am very glad to hear that."

"What else must I do?"

"You must place the estate in the hands of an able solicitor or agent to be administered for you."

"Will you find one for me?"

"I will."

"What next?"

"The most judicious thing to do, I think," he said, "is to lock up this house and travel a while. Probably you will want to do a little shopping in New York. From there write the Colonel that you will have to forego the pleasure of his and Amy's society, as you have decided to go to Europe for the summer. And your plans for the winter are undecided. You feel that you require a little change. In that way—by doing these three things—you cut the ground away from under his feet. He won't have a leg left to stand upon. But do not write him until you are out of Pennsylvania, of which state you are a resident. I do not think the Colonel will dare to continue his conspiracy against you when he realizes that you have been warned. He will prefer to rely upon your generosity rather than risk failure in his plot which, of course, would antagonize you. Still, it is better to be on the safe side. Outside of your own state, you are virtually safe."

"Virtually?"

"Yes. You must, of course, avoid any conduct that might be construed as being peculiar."

She sat quite still for a few minutes. Then she spoke, under her breath.

"I am afraid. I am mortally afraid. Oh, if you knew the ghastly, horrid fear I have of that dreadful man."

"There is no reason why you should feel that way, now. Do as I advise, and I believe you are absolutely secure."

"Believe?"

"Believe, yes."

"But believing is not sufficient. You must devise ways and means of making me quite safe."

"I repeat, I can see no way in which the Colonel can harm you if you follow my advice to the letter."

"You will stay near me, won't you? You will stay near me all the time? I ask because, if my affairs are put into the hands of an agent, you may not find—you may not care for a position which affords you no activity—that is—unless you yourself will be my agent——" she broke off, ingloriously.

"Dear child," he said, in his most grandfatherly manner, "you must perceive yourself that my traveling about with you, even if you have Mrs. Pultney-Greene with you, is quite impossible."

"Why—impossible?" Her cheeks were red.

Matthew Ferguson rose from his chair and, walking to the balustrade, leaned against it and intently regarded the valley beyond. He whistled softly for a fleeting moment. Then he turned toward her, as he spoke.

"I have a confession to make to you. I am not the man you take me to be. I mean, I am here under an assumed name. My real name is Ferguson, Matthew Ferguson."

"Matthew Ferguson?" she asked, in amazement. "Not *the* Mr. Ferguson?"

"The same," he said, curtly.

She arose and came and stood beside him. Her voice was sweet and tender, and her lovely face wore an expression of unconscious feminine pride, of delightful anticipation of the expected answer to her question.

"And why did the great Matthew Ferguson care to bother with such a very insignificant person as myself? I thought he confined his acts of philanthropy to cases involving many sufferers?"

Looking down into that sweet face, he felt that even then he had his reward for the sleepless nights, the vigils,

the harrowing fear to which this sorry business had put him.

"You seem to think that Matthew Ferguson is a sort of eleemosynary engine," he said.

"Yes," she assented, roguery in her eyes, "a sort of sublimated eleemosynary engine that grinds out so and so much kindness per day, at a given rate, because it is so constructed that it cannot do otherwise. And it never gives a thought to itself."

"Then let me tell you that you are vastly mistaken. The eleemosynary engine has not only a head of its own, giving a great deal of thought to itself, but it has also a *heart* of its own."

The word "heart" seemed to fluster her strangely.

"You haven't explained why the eleemosynary engine rolled my way," she said, confusedly.

Her archness, her drollery, and her confusion were delicious. He had thought of her so long as the personification of woe that this change, for which he knew he was responsible, delighted him. Soft and yielding and yearning she seemed.

"Why do you think it did?" he parried.

"I thought I knew—fancied—surmised—" she was laughing softly, "why, Montrose French showed such allegiance. Since self-interest, of course, is a recognized motive of humanity." She uttered a delightful throaty laugh. "But how am I to know why the formidable eleemosynary creature, Matthew Ferguson, came here at all?"

Her raillery intoxicated him. He stooped and, from the top of the trimly cut hedge of box, growing below the terrace, lifted a branch of brambles which someone had thrown there. He pressed his fingers down heroically upon the brambles until they ate into the tender

flesh, making him wince with pain. Then he threw the branch away.

"What made you do that?" she inquired, paling suddenly.

"I hardly know," he replied, carelessly, "unless I thought that the feel of the brambles would be soothing to me while I replied to your question."

"It's the first time I have heard brambles spoken of as soothing," said she, laughing softly.

"The reason of a man who is—troubled, let us say—may be saved by interposition of a toothache, or a spider-bite, or a mosquito-bite, or neuralgia or—or——"

"Or brambles," she concluded.

"Or brambles," conceded Matthew Ferguson, "or any minor bodily ill that deflects his thoughts from such important emotional states as hatred, jealousy, ambition, greed, murderous lust, or—will you not help me find a word again as before?"

Doris tossed her head with enchanting mischievousness.

"Because I read your mind once, sir," she said, "it does not follow that I can read it always. The missing word —by no chance—was——"

"What?"

"I have forgotten it," she teased.

"I have it now," he said, boldly. "The missing word was love. And now, as I have the brambles within reach, I will answer your question."

"It is so long ago since I asked it that I have forgotten what I asked."

"You asked why the eleemosynary engine, alias Montrose French, alias Matthew Ferguson, rolled to your feet."

"Why, so I did."

"It rolled your way because, last Midsummer Eve,

while Matthew Ferguson was in the Manor grounds, along with a legion of other folk who do not matter, he heard the name of a woman. And the name was sweeter in his ears than the song of the thrush or the purling of a brook that has just freed itself from its winter's coverlid of snow and ice. Then he saw the woman, and when he looked upon her face he knew that it was the one face in the Universe for him; then he heard her voice, and it seemed to him not as a voice but as a soul embodied in sound. She walked through the moonlight, and he followed. She lifted her hands to the vagrant moonbeams, and he saw the gesture. She said, 'My love, my love, when are you coming to me?' And he heard. And, because he thought that she was unmarried, he believed that, like himself, she had lived all her life in expectation that somewhere in the world there was one face, one voice, one heart, one soul, which, on entering her life, would be known to her as the one face, one voice, one heart, one soul in the Universe that counted for herself. And then, this man who was a dreamer in spite of his worldliness and world-craft——"

"Then?" Doris prompted in a small, still voice.

"Then he learned that she was married."

She looked at him with an expression which he could not analyze. Gone were all her coquetry, raillery, and drollery. The light in her eyes was very sweet and tender and compassionate.

"After that," Matthew continued, "he went away. He fought a terrible battle with himself, the battle of a man who knows there is no hope, and that, unless he intends to kill himself, he must find will-power to live, so that living might be living indeed, and not a going-under.

"After that it occurred to him that there were other sweet, true, good women in the world, and that his burden might be easier to bear, or might shrink away, if he

were to marry, though he knew that he would never be able to give another woman the love and adoration he had given the Woman. He tried very hard to convince himself that this was the right way, but he did not succeed. And on the very night when he concluded that his life must be a lonely, desolate road, he received word that the Woman's husband had been killed."

Doris looked at him keenly, but said nothing.

"Then," Matthew continued, "he felt horribly ashamed because he could not feel sorrier than he did. But he could not bring himself to feel sorry, though he knew that the Woman who was dearer to him than life itself was suffering cruelly."

Doris blanched perceptibly.

"You have a good deal of courage to tell me that," she said.

"I must tell you the truth," he said, "good and bad, as it happens. The rest is briefly told. He heard that she was menaced by a grave danger——"

"Who told you?" she asked quickly. "Who knew?"

"Everybody seems to have known that something had gone wrong at the Hall," he replied, "and Amanda Hart, who is my first cousin's wife, wrote me. Mrs. Pulney-Greene had implored Doctor Hart to help her."

"And then you left New York and passed as a poor secretary, with a weak chest, just to find out what was wrong and to help me?"

He nodded.

"And you were neither poor nor a secretary?"

"Neither," he affirmed.

"And the weak chest?"

"The weak chest," said Matthew, "was an outrageous imposition."

"I think," said Doris, impulsively, "that you are the noblest man I have ever met."

Matthew laughed.

"Because I pretended to have a weak chest?" he inquired, mocking her.

"Because—because—simply because you're good and unselfish and—and noble."

"Call me neither good nor unselfish. For what I did was done in hope of a reward. Doris Diberto, will you marry me?"

"If I refuse to marry you, cheating you out of your reward, will you forsake me now?"

"No, for I am quite sure that in the end you will marry me."

She persisted.

"If you were certain that I will not marry you would you abandon me now to my uncle?"

"I cannot imagine myself doubting something that I *know* will take place," quoth he.

Doris smiled, but did not speak. He asked the question again, a little impatiently.

"Will you marry me?"

"Marry you!" she exclaimed, as if a conception of the nature of his request had been made clear to her only at that moment.

He was a little taken aback. He had expected a violent reply in the negative, which he would not have minded, knowing that positive opposition is easier to overcome than languid indifference. Her reply was so non-committal that it annoyed him.

"When a man tells a woman he loves her," he said, a little stiffly, "and asks her to marry him, usage in polite society prescribes that she answer him 'yea' or 'nay.'"

"Matthew Ferguson," she said, "how can I marry you?"

"Why not?" he inquired, civilly. "What is the im-

pediment? I assure you, the damsels of New York consider me an eminently eligible match."

"But I am not a 'damsel,'" she rejoined, trying to suppress a smile because of the use of the word.

"That," he said, magnificently, "does not matter. I agree to overlook the fact."

She flushed a little angrily at his impertinence. Then, recollecting all he had done for her, she made a visibly heroic effort to remain affable.

"You know very well," she said, "that I do not intend marrying again. Second marriages are——"

"What——?" he asked bluntly.

"Against my principles," she told him.

"You mean," he said coolly, "they were against your principles. Why, otherwise, did you stammer over the sentence?"

"I did not stammer," she denied hotly, her affability receding before this unwarrantably brutal onslaught. "At any rate, it amounts to the same thing."

"Pardon me, it does not. Unless present and past are interchangeable, which is a manifest absurdity."

"A principle is always a principle, if it is a principle at all," she said feebly.

"I beg to differ. Our consciences grow as do our bodies. There is growth everywhere about us. We outgrow our clothes and our principles, and find ourselves a new garment and a new soul."

"That's nonsense," she said.

"Well, we won't argue the matter any further just now. I expected you to refuse me, at any rate. So it doesn't matter particularly."

"You expected——" she repeated in a blank, dazed way. "You expected?" She looked at him, horror in her eyes. What did this sudden cavalier speech of his por-

tend? Evidently she did not believe the evidence of her own ears.

"Yes," he said, pleasantly, "after what you have seen of me do you believe me so lacking in delicacy as to believe that you, you of all women, should be able to reciprocate my feeling in the first year of your widowhood?"

"Then, why, may I ask, did you propose?" She was a little piqued and in her manner was a dash of that doubt which is the most miserable of all doubts that can beset and tantalize and torment the poor human heart—whether its owner be man or woman—the doubt that someone else has been amusing himself at the other's expense. She added, a little truculently, as if in this new mood he might deny having proposed: "You certainly did propose to me."

"I certainly did," said he. "I proposed because I thought you expected it."

Plainly this was monstrous. It was an unbelievable brutality, and, coming from a man who had proved himself almost a saint, it was wholly inexplicable. Poor Doris's brow, cheeks, the sweet chasm of throat and delicate ears peeping from under the golden halo of hair, flamed a burning red.

"I do not—how can you dare—really——" Tears of impotent mortification sprang to her eyes.

He became charmingly suave. All his barbed-wire impertinence dropped away from him. He was the acme of gentlemanly concern, of chivalrous thought for her.

"Briefly," he said, "I proposed to you because I thought that, in view of your morbid fear of your uncle, it would be the most practical way of assuring you of my protection."

"But you hinted—suggested—said—yes, you said that you thought I expected——"

His gentleness was extraordinary. No woman could have held out against it.

"Expected!" he exclaimed, "did I really use that word? How clumsy of me! What I meant to convey was this, of course. You, seeing my hesitation in making the offer, appealed to me for a safer protection, a more secure pledge of safety, against your uncle. I regarded that appeal as the equivalent of permission to propose."

"Oh!" she said. She was not wholly convinced. "Do not worry or tease me," she begged; "I am so miserable and frightened."

"Frightened!" Had he frightened her? "Doris," he exclaimed passionately, and all his waywardness and dissimulation dropped from him, "Doris, surely, knowing me as you do, you would never do me the injustice to fear me, would you?"

"Indeed," she said, and again the color surged up from her bosom and down from her brow, "indeed, I have felt, almost from the first minute I saw you, that once a friend you were always a friend."

"You have other good friends," he said tenderly, "though theirs is not the great good fortune to be able to serve you as well as I. Doris, I do not wish to worry or tease or trouble you in any way. What I said half in jest before is true. I would never have thought of proposing to you now if it were not for that deadly fear in your poor harrowed soul. I do not wish you to think for one moment that, like a shuttle-cock, you are being battered to and fro between two conspirators working toward different ends. At present I desire you to see in me only a friend—neither lover nor prospective husband. If you feel that you have the requisite courage to do as I have advised you to do, and, if necessary, to meet your uncle face to face and hold your own against him, then forget my offer—for the present. But, if there still lurks

in your heart that cruel dread of the man who has set afoot such a nefarious plot against you, then, my dear one, if I may so call you, marry me.

"I have one thing more to say. In asking you to marry me *I am not asking you to be my wife.* I am merely asking you to take my name, so that, being legally your husband, I have the right to act for you and be with you, under the same roof with you, I mean, at all times and at all hours. For you must realize that, as soon as my real identity becomes known, I cannot even sleep in the same hotel with you without taking the risk that that worthy uncle of yours will use the fact to tarnish your reputation."

She sat very still and quiet. Presently she spoke:

"God has been very good to give me the love of two such men."

"Does that mean that you will trust yourself to me?"

Without heeding his question she continued: "And yet it is only fair to you to say that you are the better man."

"Doris!"

"He loved me, he idolized me; but he would not have risen to such heights of devotion for me."

"Doris!"

"If you wish, I will marry you, for I am a terrible coward, and lack the moral courage needed to go through with this alone."

"Then—marry me soon."

"The sooner the better," she said. "And, if Lawrence can look down upon me, I pray he may forgive me. A second marriage has always seemed detestable to me because it is made possible by the death of some one we love. It seems hardly possible that only a brief six months have passed since Lawrence died. Still, had he lived, I would never have given thought to another man."

"Dear child," he said tenderly, "you are not giving thought to any other man now. That may come later, not too late, I hope. But, at present, for a year to come at least, you are merely embracing the safest means of assuring your peace of mind. That is all."

There followed a long pause. She played nervously with a filmy lace handkerchief that lay in her lap. All at once, with a little ripping sound, the dainty fabric was torn to shreds. She laughed, rolled it into a little ball, and tossed it away.

"If I marry you," she said, the pink invading her cheeks again, "I shall do so because I shall expect ultimately to be your wife, not merely to enjoy the protection of your name."

"I wish you to feel contented and secure; I wish you to feel, moreover, that you have married, not a cad who takes advantage of your need, but a man who approaches your ideal of a high-minded gentleman."

"I see that ideal fulfilled in you, Matthew Ferguson," she said very gravely. "And contented I will assuredly not be if I receive all and give nothing in return."

"If you give me your faith," he said, "you give me a gift that is great enough for the present."

Her sweet lips became tremulous. Through the brown eyes flickered the motes of gold, making them shine like gems of unbelievable glory. The man felt his breath come quick and hard. She was offering herself to him and he uttered a wordless prayer for strength to deal with her according to her own fine notions of the chivalry due women.

"How little you know yourself." She loomed before him suddenly not as a fragile child-widow, not as a delicate, dainty girl, but as a glorious, superbly fashioned woman, instinct with that knowledge and experience of

the world, of men and women, of love which he lacked. He flushed darkly.

"How little *you* know me," he responded alertly. "It is the fashion nowadays to measure love by the lack of self-control it induces. Men and women, also, seem to make it their boast that repression of the love instinct is impossible. I am not of that tribe. Such love is to me not love, but an emotion so much lower that I will not pronounce its name in your presence. Love is love only when hedged about and chastened and subjected to spiritual filtration by self-control of the most rigid kind."

She did not reply, and when he looked at her he saw that her eyes were lowered. Her sweet lips were pursed, the very sweep of eyelashes and swelling curve of the eyes under the lids seemed inviting. The entire woman breathed witchery, allure, seduction. It came to him all at once that perhaps she loved him even now. He spoke impulsively.

"Doris," he cried, "do you love me now?"

She lifted her glorious orbs and looked him straight in the eyes. Their expression, elusive and at the same time bewilderingly soft and warm, went to his head.

"Doris," he cried, with not much of that rigid self-control of which he had boasted a minute ago in evidence, "answer me, do you love me now?"

"To admit that," she laughed a low, mocking laugh, "after one or two things you said before, were to place myself outside the pale of your regard."

"Doris," he implored, "forget what I said before. Answer me truthfully. Do you love me now?"

"Truthfully——"

"Yes, dearest——"

"Truthfully, I wanted to be quite sure that you really love me and did not mistake friendship for love. I am convinced of it now. So all is well."

"For you—but for me—answer me—do you love me now?"

"Not now, Matthew Ferguson, not yet!" All the cajolery, the unconscious coquetry had faded from her person. Once more she was the slim, frail creature calculated to inspire tenderness rather than passion. But the fire of his love had flamed too high to be quenched so easily.

"Not now, not yet—what do you mean, Doris? Be plain, with me, dearest."

"I will not be more explicit than I have been," said she.

"That is hardly fair—toward me," he gasped.

She laughed.

"Matthew Ferguson," she said, "let me tell you, sir, that you are a very inconsistent person. When I demurred, because I thought that your plan of conduct was one that angels might hesitate to aspire to, you assured me it was not quite fair to yourself. And now, because I do not allow you to wrest the very secrets of my soul from me, you pant and storm and rage and declare I am treating you unfairly."

He had a quick prophetic vision that with this woman whom he adored, perhaps because he adored her, he would not always have the upper hand, so he said nothing.

"We are wasting time," she said lightly. "I should not wonder, Matthew Ferguson, if, in spite of being the paragon of a husband you pretend you shall be, you would turn out a monster of tyranny."

"Doris!" he protested. He was a little hurt.

"Yes, sir husband-that-is-to-be, a monster of tyranny."

He answered her meekly, in a tone which the great infallible Apostle of Scientific Egoism had never used before:

"I dare say, Doris, I am a fool."

"You are a dear," she said, but even her kindness was tinctured with that subtle mischievousness—he would have liked to term it deviltry, but didn't—with which she had been plaguing him.

"But, then," said he, "are not all men in love fools?"

Doris's eyes twinkled.

"I have had only such men under close observation who were in love with me. Do you insinuate that their foolishness consisted in caring for me?"

"I insinuate nothing; I declare nothing; I ask nothing," he said in a desperate voice.

She took his arm as he arose and started to walk away.

"Matthew Ferguson," she said, walking along with him, and now she was all yielding softness and winning sweetness again, " I have something to tell you, sir, quite of my own accord."

"What is it, Doris?"

"That, though I cannot tell you now whether I love you or not, perhaps because I myself do not know, perhaps, again, because I am really placed in a position which condemns me to a cruel conflict between past and present, which you, who are so high-minded and courteous a gentleman, understand quite thoroughly; still, I venture to predict, that some day, when I may do so without losing my self-respect, I will know and speak my mind as regards my feelings for you quite emphatically."

"Is that all, Doris?"

"By no means." Her hand on his arm was all clinging warmth and swaying nearness, and on her face was an expression not of mockery as before, but of adorable shyness and shrinking timidity. "By no means, Matthew Ferguson. If that day of which I speak should come a

little earlier than you expect, or think right, you will forgive me, will you not?"

"Doris!"

"Because, you know, Matthew Ferguson, you are so very fine and kind that it would be pardonable, would it not, if your wife were to fall quite desperately in love with you?"

## CHAPTER XIV

*Matthew Ferguson Marries the Lady of His Choice*

Doris asked for three days—three days of grace she called them, with that playfulness which serves women to mask bitter pain and fear as well as happiness. In those three days much was done. Her room was dismantled and the black slip covers were destroyed. The woodwork was repainted a different color, the records were packed away and stored in an outhouse which served as a store-room, and the picture of Lawrence Diberto was taken up to the attic, where hung an assortment of paintings which old Pietro had picked up as old masters, but which Lawrence, after his uncle's death, had banished from the picture gallery in the rotunda because he knew they were spurious.

Mrs. Pultney-Greene expressed her surprise that Doris should have this picture, which was an excellent oil color, taken up to the third floor instead of hanging it in the rotunda, but Doris said that it would be impossible for her to see the picture take its place among the commonplace surroundings of everyday life after having treasured it in a shrine of its own and among surroundings of the most profound solemnity.

Matthew happened to come into the hall just as James and the second footman were carrying the picture upstairs. It had been covered with a sheet to protect it

against dust and falling bits of plaster. Matthew Ferguson was seized with a sudden desire to look upon the likeness of the man who had been Doris's husband, but he was too sensitively fine to look at it without her knowledge, and to ask her permission to see it was out of the question. He dismissed the wish with the reflection that it had been prompted by something akin to morbid curiosity. It might have been well for him if he had looked.

Doris kept to her rooms almost entirely during these three days. She came downstairs only for the evening meal—dinner—and this circumstance worried Matthew. He spoke to Mrs. Pultney-Greene about it, who assured him, with an inscrutable smile, that Doris was very well employed.

"I consider," she said, "that this marriage of hers to you is the very best thing that could have happened to her. The circumstances attending it are so unusual that you are both justified in marrying at so early a date. You realize, however, do you not, that people are going to talk?"

"What do you mean?" he asked sternly.

"They are going to gossip. And, although I am the last person in the world to underestimate the value of public opinion, still, your case and Doris's is so exceptional that I think you can well afford to scorn idle gossip."

"I wish you would be more explicit," said Matthew brusquely. "You cannot possibly mean that anyone is going to cast aspersions upon Doris's character because of our early marriage?"

Mrs. Pultney-Greene shrugged her shoulders.

"To be forewarned is to be forearmed," she said relapsing into silence, nor could he persuade her to say more.

Matthew postponed his visit to the minister, Dr. Miner,

who was to marry them, until the morning of the day set for the marriage, for he feared that, through some leak the Colonel might yet get wind of what was about to happen and cause an unpleasant interlude. On his way to the minister's he stopped at Andrew's place to apprise Stuart of the turn affairs had taken. Stuart expressed great satisfaction when he learned how thoroughly the Colonel had been routed, but, when Matthew told him that he and Doris were to be married that afternoon, he looked very blank and said nothing. And then Matthew knew that Mrs. Pultney-Greene's forecast had been correct, for there was in Stuart's eyes a look as of doubt which made Matthew very angry.

"Look here, Stuart," Matthew said, "you understand that this case is exceptional. You know that I loved Mrs. Diberto the very first moment I saw her; but I would not have thought of asking her to marry me so soon if it were not for her wild fear of the Colonel."

Stuart still looked doubtful but said nothing. Matthew changed his tone from the explanatory to the appealing.

"Look here, Stuart," he said, "I don't want you to think me a rotter. There are few men about whose opinion I care in the least, but I do care about yours. Don't you see that, loving Doris Diberto as I do, I simply must protect her against this rascally uncle of hers?"

The glances of the two men met. The gaze that searches mercilessly to the very groundrock of the soul gleamed from Stuart's eyes. Suddenly he stretched out his hand.

"It's your own affair, old chap," he said heartily, "and I am convinced you think you are doing right. That means that you are doing right, no matter what anyone is going to say. In the first place, people are going to charge Mrs. Diberto with heartlessness; in the second place, they are going to charge you with being mercen-

ary; in the third place, they are going to accuse you of taking undue advantage; in the fourth place, they are going to——"

"For the love of mercy, Stuart, stop!" Matthew cried, laughing. "And when you come to New York to sell your novel you'll be sure to stay with us, won't you? Just as long as you please, just to show that you do not disapprove of us, you know."

"That's a great way of offering to lodge and feed a poor devil of a writer who won't have the price of a week's board at a decent hostelry in his pocket when he goes to New York to sell his wares."

"When do you finish your novel?"

"I don't know," said Stuart dubiously.

"Well, when you do finish it, and after it is published, I hope it will be a best seller."

Stuart's manner froze instantly.

"I aspire to produce literature," he said, "not a best seller."

"And can't a popular book be literature as well?"

"Impossible," said Stuart dogmatically.

"Why not?" Matthew was very much amused.

"Well, simply because it cannot. In the first place, popular books are always based on popular themes, which do not lend themselves to literary handling; in the second place, the great popular theme is love, of which I know nothing and desire to know less; in the third place, popular novels always end with marriage, which is nonsense; in the fourth——"

"Stop!" Matthew cried, laughing. "Remember, my dear fellow, I am to be married this afternoon, so the popular book gets my vote, every time."

"Wait," said Stuart lugubriously. "Just you wait, Mr. Montrose French. Perhaps you will change your mind."

Matthew shouted with laughter.

"Stuart," he said, "you take it from me. You're a three-ring circus. When I found you in the first ring you detested gossip; in the second ring you began to cultivate gossip, but despised love; in the third ring, the ring of the future, my poor boy, alas! I tremble at what I see before you."

"Love. Never," said Stuart.

Matthew wrung the other's hand with such vigor that, had their palms been covered with leather or any fabric other than human skin, serious abrasions must have been the result.

Matthew then proceeded to Doctor Miner and stated his case.

Doctor Miner was a character. He was a short, white-haired, florid-faced little man with a thick body. His garb was so aggressively ecclestiastical that he looked more like a Roman Catholic priest than an Episcopal clergyman. He had served as chaplain in the Civil War and a bullet had lodged in his sternum which had never been removed; and, through exerting a pressure upon the lungs, this battered old bullet in the breastbone caused him to speak with a curious rasping intake of the breath, which became particularly marked when he became flurried, creating the impression that he was scolding. Matthew had been warned against his manner by Mrs. Pultney-Greene.

"I am very much surprised," rasped the old man, "that a woman whom I held in as high a regard as Mrs. Diberto should think of remarrying within such an indecently short period as has elapsed since her husband's death."

"Those are hard words, Doctor Miner."

"Hard words for hard facts, Mr. Ferguson," scolded the little minister. "Goodness gracious, it is a little over a year since I married her to Lawrence Diberto, and it is

half a year since I read the burial service for him. Ten days ago I buried her mother. What sort of a heart, I ask, is hidden behind that beautiful and shining face of hers?"

Mr. Ferguson became blindly angry. He checked the impulse to vent his anger in futile and insulting words by reminding himself that, as Doris desired to have this man officiate at her wedding, he must make every possible effort to conciliate him. Besides, with his quick perception of consequences, he realized that, if he could prevail upon the Rector of Holy Innocents to marry Doris and himself, that very fact would serve to place a quietus upon any undesirable talk which otherwise might drag Doris's name into the mire.

"Doctor Miner," he said, "I fully appreciate your viewpoint."

"Then," rasped the doctor, "you will not be surprised to hear that I decline—emphatically decline to be the officiating clergyman at this ungodly and unseemly marriage, at this iniquitous travesty of a sacrament."

"Will you do me the justice to listen to me for a moment?" Mr. Ferguson inquired politely.

"I have never yet refused to listen to anyone," snapped the Rector of Holy Innocents.

"Good," said Matthew Ferguson, "I am marrying Mrs. Diberto because she needs my protection against her uncle, a Colonel Chalmers, whom you may have met."

"And a very pleasant man, sir," shot out the little minister, quick as a pistol, "though he did fight on the wrong side of the line during the Rebellion."

"I see that you are vindictive," said Matthew.

"Vindictive? I think my agreeable words concerning the Colonel show that I am not."

"Yet you refer to the great strife that rent this nation for four cruel years as the Rebellion. Charitable folks,

though they are not in the ministry, consider it good manners as well as good religion to call it the Civil War."

"Um," coughed the Rector, "and what has that got to do with the morality of your proposed marriage?"

"The Colonel, Doctor Miner, in spite of his charming personality, which no man will gainsay, is as fine a scamp as ever breathed outside of jail. He and that man, Knox, whose name, I understand, is the equivalent of all that is infamous in this country, are confederates."

"Um," coughed the Rector, "are you certain?"

"Positive. The Colonel intended having his niece declared insane."

"Because she is going to marry again—so soon? Some excuse for him, I should say."

"He knows nothing of our projected marriage. Doctor Miner, I appeal to your manhood and your love of fair play. Mrs. Diberto is not insane, but she is intensely nervous, and the fact that the Chalmers have simply camped on her ever since her husband's death has aggravated her nervousness to an unbelievable degree. Her fear of the Colonel borders on panic."

"Um," coughed the minister again. "I admit that Colonel Chalmers took advantage of her hospitality. Also, I have heard rumors which were afloat concerning Mrs. Diberto's queer conduct."

"Then," said Matthew quickly, "since my name and standing in my profession must exonerate me of the charge of seeking self-aggrandisement through this alliance, you should do the lady, who is about to take my name, the justice of believing that she is marrying me for reasons of expediency to secure my protection before the law, and not for reasons of undue emotionalism, which, I fully agree with you, were she to entertain them or be actuated by them six months after her husband's

death, would brand her conduct as unethical and contemptible, if not as downright immoral."

"And yourself, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Doctor Miner, I love my wife-to-be with a love so true and deep that I need not blush to avow it. I can say only this. If the charge of lunacy, which the Colonel intends to prefer against her, were true, I would still wish to marry her, so that, as her husband, I might have the legal right to embrace the best means available for restoring her to health. As it is, all I will have to contend with is a febrile nervousness, very different from hysteria, and yet, I believe, quite as dangerous unless dealt with in the proper spirit by one to whom she is dear."

"Um, um," coughed the Rector. "Mr. Ferguson, you are a very remarkable man. And a very brave man. I have heard much of you and your eloquence. I supposed that your delivery was bombastic; that of the rhetorician. It is simple, and it is convincing, because you are sincere in what you say. When did you say you wished me to be at the Manor to marry you?"

Matthew Ferguson had scored again, but a quivering, racking nervousness took possession of him after leaving the rector's cottage. He had been able to convince Stuart and Doctor Miner of the purity of Doris's character. There were hundreds of persons who knew her and him whose opinion he would be powerless to influence because it was manifestly impossible to harangue with each one of these persons in Doris's behalf. For the first time in his life he cared for the opinion of others. He felt that it would be incumbent to speak of this to Doris, since it was preferable to have her refuse to consummate the marriage at the last moment to having her repent afterward of having taken the step.

He had asked Doctor Miner to be at the Hall at three o'clock. At two o'clock Hopkins came to the study to

say that Mrs. Diberto was waiting for Mr. Ferguson in the library.

As Matthew walked down the beautiful old stairway he was amazed to find that he was nervous all of a sudden with quite a new, different nervousness than that inspired by concern for Doris. It was certainly idiotic for a man to feel nervous because he was to stand up beside the woman he loved and repeat the few insignificant sentences and answer a few perfectly simple questions that constitute the marriage ceremony. Now he realized that an occasion can carry with it an overwhelming emotional atmosphere. He tried to laugh himself out of the distressing sensation that was so unexpected and new and he wished with all his heart, for no rational reason whatever, that Doris would decide not to marry him that day. Then he told himself that he was an abject coward, and, bracing up, walked into the library feeling as if he were being led to his execution.

Doris rose as he entered and came forward to meet him. She was dressed in pearl gray crêpe de chine, of so faint a shade that it seemed almost white, and would have seemed white, perhaps, but for the exquisite cream lace with which it was richly trimmed. It was the first time that he had seen her in any color and he stopped at the threshold with a gesture of surprise and admiration. He had known she was the loveliest of women, but her black gowns, while not impairing her beauty, had made that beauty seem hard and brittle at times. In this pearl gray dress, with its soft creamy draperies, her loveliness assumed a new and insistent note.

"Doris!" he exclaimed, lifting her fingers to his lips and kissing them adoringly.

Her face went white.

"Did you think," she answered, "after all you have

done for me, and are doing for me, that I would marry you in the mourning I have worn for another man?"

With a start he realized of what great importance externals are even to the most superior and single-minded women. This gown, it seemed, was symbolical to her of the fact that her old life must be put away. He felt intensely grateful to her for the thought.

He led her back to the chair whereon she had been seated when he entered the room. He perceived, with concern, as he touched her arm, that she was shivering.

"Doris, what is the matter?"

"I am ashamed to say it, Matthew, but I am frightened, just dreadfully, horribly frightened."

His own knees began to quake under him but he spoke bravely, reassuringly.

"You must not be frightened now." He wished that the ceremony might be performed immediately. His state, in fact, was analogous to the state he had been in when, as a small boy, he had been taken to the dentist for his first filling. At first he had prayed for a miraculous delay, and then he had prayed his agony might begin at once so that it would be ended more quickly. He tried to make himself see the situation in a ludicrous light, but even that did not expel his fright. It was only when he looked at Doris's white face that his love and pity for her made him forget himself.

"I am reproaching myself bitterly," she said.

"Doris," he replied, sinking all thought of himself, "if you feel that your conscience is going to reproach you for marrying now, or for marrying again, then it will be better for us not to marry."

The trembling Doris pressed her hands tightly together.

"I cannot tell you what I have been through," she said. "All my life, from childhood on, second marriages seemed an abomination to me. To me it was the touchstone of

fineness, particularly in a woman, not to be able to give that particular feeling twice."

He looked at her searchingly for a moment.

"Doris," his words came slowly, "I felt precisely the same way. It is a strange coincidence that this should be so. It has been one of the principal tenets of my life that I would never marry a woman who had felt so much as a fleeting infatuation for some man before me. I felt, as you say, that something must be wrong with her ethics, if she was able to bestow the same feeling on two different men. You see that I have changed my views. Nor do I think myself contemptible for doing so. I simply realize now that life is greater, infinitely more complex and far more replete with inwardness than we poor pygmies who live it can hope to understand. It takes a long, long lesson to learn the full import of life and many a man and woman, through lack of time, through indifference or stupidity, never con the entire lesson."

"I do not quite understand."

"I mean, dear, that we must allow life to influence and mold our characters toward some ultimate end, and that means that our thoughts, beliefs, and principles must inevitably undergo changes unless we are wholly deficient in that pliability which is the primary requisite of all sentient beings. I believe, dear Doris, that, so long as you believe this second marriage of yours to be wrong, it is wrong—for you. Nor will I try to persuade you that it is right, for I believe that in the end, when you learn to love me, you will feel that the consummation of our marriage is not wrong, but right."

"That is just what I fear," she said, the color suddenly mounting her cheeks; "when I begin to love you perhaps my vision will become blurred and I will change my beliefs to coincide with my desires."

"Look at it in this way," he said. "To the reverent-

minded love between man and woman—true love, I mean, into which there enters so much that is sacred and tender and spiritual, is such a wonderful, such an exquisite gift, second only to the gift of life itself, that, to reject it when no obstacle is interposed by those laws, human or divine, which govern human conduct, is not merely foolish, but culpable.

"But, so long as you feel that a second marriage is an infidelity to the dead, our marriage is a mere business contract, entered into for your protection. Remember that."

"A second marriage cannot be wrong since you think it right," she said with sweet humility. "I am not able, at present, to judge impartially. And I am content to take your word—for everything."

"Doris," he said, "there is one thing I have to tell you which may yet influence you against marrying me to-day. Do you realize that the world is very censorious and that, if we marry to-day, cruel things are going to be said about you?"

"I do not care what anyone says about me," she said proudly, "so long as I know I am doing right."

"You are sure?"

She turned upon him swiftly.

"Are you afraid of what will be said for yourself?" she asked a little scornfully. "I have answered you for myself. If you forsake me now and Colonel Chalmers comes back here I shall let him declare me insane and put me away anywhere, so long as he promises never to come near me again. I am demoralized with fear."

"Very well," he said, "then it is settled."

"Not quite, Matthew Ferguson." She arose and stood beside him. "What if I do not learn to love you, after all?"

He hesitated a moment before answering. This was

no time to reply with a witticism, to tell her he knew that she would love him ultimately.

"If you feel in the end that you cannot give me that romantic love without which marriage is a mockery and a farce, or, if you find that you can give it to another man but not to me, then I will have our contract annulled. There will be no legal difficulties in the way of that."

"Oh, Matthew Ferguson!" she said with a little gasp.

"I am painfully aware," he continued, "that in this, your second, marriage there cannot be for you any of that glamour and romance that accrued to the first."

"Oh, Matthew Ferguson!" she cried again, "no romance about this beautiful, noble love of yours that you are spreading out before me with such magnificence? No romance? I feel as if I had never known the meaning of romance before."

"Then all I can say is trust me. If you desire your freedom at any time it is yours for the asking."

Flushing softly, with shining eyes, she stood before him proud and erect. He could even perceive the pulse beating in the sweet, white throat.

"Do you really think so meanly of me?" she cried. "Do you really think after all you have done and are doing that I could be so insensible of your kindness as to love somebody else in the end?"

"Ultimately," he said, "love will go where it listeth."

"Ultimately," she insisted, "love will come out of gratitude."

"Poor love," said he, "that is garmented in such homespun as gratitude."

"And are admiration and respect homespun, also?" she asked.

"Homespun!" he cried disdainfully, "they are a mere rag carpet for love to wipe its feet upon."

She stood looking at him with painful irresolution.

"Matthew Ferguson," she cried, advancing a step, and again the crimson tide rippled over face, brow and hands and shapely arms, "there are two things I have to tell you before you marry me."

"What are they?"

"Since that morning in the garden, the morning of the day on which the Chalmers came back, when you spoke to me of so many things, I did not—at night—kneel before the picture—or listen to the records."

He pressed her hand gently.

"And, Matthew, you will not mind, if I speak to you occasionally of Lawrence Diberto, for—I loved him—very dearly."

"There is no reason, Doris," he said, suppressing the momentary wave of jealousy, "why you should not speak to your best friend as much as you please of the man you loved."

"There is another thing—it is very, very hard to say—and yet I owe it to you——"

"Not unless you really wish to tell me, Doris."

"I do—I do want to tell you. Though I think so much of Lawrence Diberto, I think of him as a boy, or as a young man, principally as a child, and——"

"Yes, Doris?"

Her burning cheeks went a dead white. The expression of her face was pitiable.

"Though I loved him so very dearly, the shock of his violent death has driven from my memory every recollection of the material relation of marriage. I thought you would like to know. It brings me nearer to the ideal woman of whom you dreamed."

Then she lifted her hands and covered her face as she turned her head away and began to weep softly. He longed to put his arm about her, to hold her protectingly, but he feared to offend her sensibilities.

Suddenly, speaking between tears and a tremulous smile, she said:

"As you are going to marry me, Matthew Ferguson, you might at least put your arm about me and let me cry in comfort."

## CHAPTER XV

*Matthew Ferguson Shows That a Chivalrous Gentleman Must Be Chivalrous Even to His Own Wife*

On the morning of April twenty-fifth Matthew Ferguson walked into his office, having been absent just five weeks and three days. It was before nine o'clock when he entered his sanctum, and Tommy Burbridge was the only member of his staff who had arrived.

Tommy greeted his principal with affectionate respect, in which there was something of the intimacy of possession, as if Tommy had a part ownership in Matthew Ferguson, instead of himself being owned by the famous young lawyer during two-thirds of his waking hours. All of Mr. Ferguson's clerks, from the accountant down to the office boy, treated him in precisely the same way. It was to that power to infuse the sense of personal nearness in all with whom he came in contact that in great measure his remarkable career was due.

"There's something in that big envelope that Mr. Cravatt seems to be getting a little impatient about," said Tommy, indicating a square dark blue envelope. "It came in two days ago."

"Good boy," said Matthew Ferguson, which was his democratic, if unchieftainlike, way of expressing his appreciation of the fact that Tommy had lost no time in calling his attention to the document.

His brow furrowed with displeasure as he read Mr. Cravatt's communication, and he ejaculated:

"Oh, sugar!"—the innocuous expletive of his boyhood, of which he still availed himself at times. Mr. Cravatt's letter contained a request for a comprehensive plan of the railroad special delivery scheme which Mr. Ferguson had suggested at Mrs. van Duyskuk's memorable dinner.

It was intensely disagreeable to Matthew that the drafting of this plan, which he knew was as unethical as any scheme ever devised for mulcting the public, would be his first task after his marriage. For five weeks he had acted from pure and disinterested motives and, devious and tortuous as had been his labors, he had been forced to concentrate his entire energy toward beneficent and wholesome ends. His whole mind, as it were, had been drenched in integrity of purpose. During the idyll at Diberto Manor he had barely given thought to Scientific Egoism, and, in consequence, the hold which the Infallible System for Perpetrating Knavery as Philanthropy had lost much of its hold on him, and, most decidedly, it was not in good operative condition at that moment.

It was, however, manifestly impossible for him to risk a rupture with the Powers at this juncture. Doris had brought up the subject of money, and had asked that she be permitted to defray her share of their joint expenses, but he had been firm in his denial of this request. Legally she was his wife, and no man who was a man would think of accepting money from his wife for household expenses.

Now, he almost regretted his highhanded refusal. He could not ask Doris, who had been accustomed to a sumptuousness in living, in furniture, in dress and general equipment such as he had seldom seen equaled, to live at any hotel that was not obviously the best. The

salary of seventy-five thousand a year which the Powers were paying him had seemed at first so gigantic because his frugal personal tastes aspired to what was adequate, rather than to what was expensive, but, as he sat staring at Cravatt's letter and dreading the possible loss of his income, he was suddenly seized with a sense of sickening dismay. He realized with shame that he was afraid of coming into a collision with this man and his cohorts because of money.

He set to work immediately upon the distasteful task, in order to get it out of the way. He did it well and soon had finished dictating it to Tommy.

"Well, Baron," he asked, "going to disown me after that?"

"By no means," said Tommy, looking at him with admiring eyes. "You think you've done an unrighteous thing in making this suggestion. I must remind you that I am a Socialist, and I hail it with delight. We see growth toward Socialism in every measure, such as this, which strengthens the trusts, because the trusts are really preparing the way for government ownership."

But in spite of Tommy's exoneration, which was perfectly sincere, Matthew, not being a Socialist, was distinctly relieved when he received a letter from Mr. Cravatt a week later which stated that, owing to the coming campaign, his excellent scheme for making possible a discrimination between large and small shippers must be laid aside. Matthew's relief was that of a would-be murderer whose weapon, having failed him, feels, once his anger is spent, that Providence has been merciful in working a miracle in his behalf.

He wished to engage an apartment in one of the sumptuous ten thousand dollar a year apartments on Central Park West or South, but Doris, who had cleverly extracted from him a fair survey of his income, demurred,

saying that she would prefer to remain in the luxurious small suite which they occupied in one of the apartment hotels, to being bothered with housekeeping. Matthew suspected her of innocent dissimulation, but did not press the point.

Of course he took her about a good deal evenings. Mrs. van Duyskuk issued them a dinner invitation, and was delightfully cordial to Doris. Toward himself she maintained an aloofness which staggered him, and made impossible any return to their former unique and charming relations. The old lady very plainly meant him to understand that, although she distinctly disapproved of him for disobeying her, she was not such a bigot as to extend her displeasure to a perfectly innocent woman, though that woman happened to be his wife.

Grace Cravatt—he praised heaven for it—was abroad. But Alison and Doris met one evening at a dinner given by Judge Witherspoon. The two women seemed to experience a mutual shock of antagonism on meeting. Alison, in sea-green, with a filet net of silver and burnt orange in her tawny hair, looked more disreputably wonderful than ever, Matthew thought, while his Doris, in ivory white satin, a pendant of diamonds and pearls about her throat, looked divinely lovely. Alison patronized Doris prodigiously, and Matthew, who at first felt distinctly angered, was intensely amused by the little tilting match between the two women. He, standing near them, heard every word. There was no doubt that Alison had not forgiven him for going a-courting elsewhere. Not that she would have accepted him, or even encouraged him further than dallying with him for a fortnight or two, but Alison was the type of woman who is affronted if any man whatsoever withholds his homage.

During this polite conversation between the two women Matthew could not help comparing Doris with

Grace Cravatt. Grace would not have been so aggressively brilliant as his wife, nor would she have shown the temper and ungraciousness which Doris, truth to tell, plentifully exhibited. Matthew told himself that he must overcome the habit of using Grace Cravatt as a criterion for judging his wife, whenever unusual circumstances arose. He had found himself doing this more than once.

"Must have been awfully dull for you in your mountain home," said Alison to Doris. "I suppose you are delighted to be in New York."

"I'm delighted with the New Yorkers even more than with New York," said Doris. "Their belief that everybody is literally dying to live in their city is so amusing."

"Glad you like us," responded Alison, ungraciously.

"Oh, you—using you in the plural—are very entertaining."

Alison flushed.

"I suppose you mean hospitable?"

"That, too; but you afford entertainment at all times."

Alison's eyes looked dangerous, and Matthew knew that Doris had made a bitter enemy of the daughter of Thoreau Beecham.

Amanda and Andrew passed through New York the first week in June and paid the young couple a formal call. If Andrew still felt vexed with Matthew because of his marriage, he was too much of a gentleman to show it. Matthew thought his manner toward Doris charming, and forgave his kinsman for his former opposition.

Doris and Matthew speculated amusedly as to the course the Colonel would pursue. They had sent him one of the engraved announcements of their marriage, the only personal touch that went with the announcement being the words, in Doris's hand, placed opposite the name of the bridegroom, "alias Montrose French."

Matthew was inclined to think that a rascal as fertile

in resources as the Colonel would find some means of retaliating, but apparently the fangs of the old reptile were drawn. He wrote the young couple a short, concise letter couched in purely conventional language, in which he felicitated them, at the same time announcing the sudden marriage of Amy to an old school fellow whom she had re-discovered at a ball. Amy's husband was evidently a man of means, for the Colonel thanked Doris for the allowance she had generously made him, saying it would be unnecessary for him to be her pensioner in the future.

Matthew was puzzled by this move. Did the old man know himself beaten, or was he merely husbanding his strength and his perfidy for a new attack upon his niece? Matthew racked his brain to fathom what course the Colonel's inventiveness might prescribe. He could think of no way in which Colonel Chalmers could do Doris any harm, and finally dismissed his fears as groundless.

The situation between Matthew and Doris, for the present at least, was very much less complicated than they had supposed possible. It was the season when, in the preceding year, Lawrence Diberto's brief life had drawn toward its violent close. She was full of reminiscences, and Matthew, with a love in which every emotion that was not purely spiritual was thrust so completely into the background as to render his love as nearly divine as any human love can be, encouraged her to speak of her first husband as freely and as often as she pleased. He even went with her to Diberto Manor on the day before the anniversary of Lawrence's death, as she wished to visit the family vault.

All the servants at Diberto Manor had been retained, and it had been arranged that Mrs. Pultney-Greene should visit her relatives in England for the summer months. She was well connected, but had been too proud

to accept a home with any of her wealthy relatives. Doris's largess now enabled her to visit the various members of a family whose ramifications, branch, twig and leaf, were appallingly large, not as a pauper, but as a comfortably situated and wholly independent relative.

Mrs. Pultney-Greene looked ten years younger since the Chalmers had been so effectually dealt with; at the breakfast table the morning after their arrival, Matthew complimented her upon the change in her looks, and then asked her how she found Doris.

"Like a different woman," said Mrs. Pultney-Greene, scrutinizing Doris closely. "My dear Doris, you are not at all the same as formerly. You are different from what you were as a girl, and different from what you were——" she stopped in confusion. Doris concluded the sentence for her.

"You mean, I am different from what I was as Lawrence Diberto's wife. That is quite true. I was so radiantly happy during those brief six months that I am afraid my excess of happiness made me selfish and thoughtless of all about me."

Every word stabbed Matthew to the heart, but he sat and smiled at Doris and said nothing.

Mrs. Pultney-Greene took Doris by the hand.

"You were not selfish and thoughtless in those days, Doris," she said. "Forgive me, child, for what I am about to say. Are you not a little selfish and thoughtless now, in speaking of your former happiness, with your husband at your side."

"Matthew does not mind," said Doris. "You do not know him. He is the noblest and kindest man that ever lived."

"My dear Doris," said Mrs. Pultney-Greene, "right in the presence of your husband, I must say two things to you. First, observe the nicest tact, always, in speaking

of your first husband to your second husband, and, no matter how well merited your praise may be, never praise your husband to his face. No man can receive compliments from his wife and remain unspoiled."

Doris laughed.

"Compliments! Poor Matthew, it is all he has had so far in return for all his goodness and generosity. There's not another man in the world who would have done for any woman what he has done for me."

"You exaggerate, my dear Doris," said Matthew, pushing his chair from the table. "I am neither unique nor a paragon. I am very human. Do you wish me to go to the vault with you?"

It was intensely disagreeable to him to be praised by Doris on this day. He almost regretted he had come with her. Again his thoughts turned to Grace Cravatt, and he felt that for once Doris had been lacking in delicacy in a way impossible for Grace. Then he rebuked himself and prepared to do penance for his disloyalty by going to the vault with Doris.

She elected to go in the afternoon, and she elected to have Matthew go with her.

"Because I am so proud of you, dear," she said, and again the sensation as of white hot lightning ran through the man's veins. "We can stand in the vault unashamed, with clean hands and clean hearts, and, if you will go with me to-day, it will seem a sanctification of our union."

The day was one of those soft, languorous September days which seem a prolongation of summer and are so instinct with warmth that they seem prophetic of endless summer. A slight haze lay upon the hills and a dim, smoky mist rising from the earth, from burning leaves and distant forest fires added pungency to the air.

Doris did not enter the vault, but sat in silence on the

bench without, against a background of white marble, rose-purple iris and smoke-colored Pampas grass. From time to time a tear rolled softly down her cheeks, but Matthew saw that there was no violence in her grief. And, as he looked at her, he was filled with a sense of the exquisiteness of living. All his jealousy and pain and the infinitesimal resentment which he felt for her words of the morning crumbled away into nothingness. His heart was filled with a desire to make her happy, to fulfill her every expectation of him.

They drove home in silence. Matthew saw Doris drink in the deliciously rich fragrance of the air in deep breaths, and, looking at her, he realized again, as so often before, that she was experiencing, over and above her grief for the one she had lost, a much more poignant grief and compassion because he who had passed away had lost his life.

Not a word did they speak until they faced each other in the library, where a log fire was burning, for the large rooms of the rambling old mansion were likely to be cold at night, even in September.

"Matthew," she said suddenly, "I wonder if I ever can thank you enough."

"Hush, Doris," he said. "You speak too much of gratitude. I do not ask for it, and I do not want it. Until you can give me your love, say nothing."

She did not reply, but stood looking at him in evident alarm. Yet, in spite of her perturbation, there was in her attitude something alluring, of which, doubtless, she herself was entirely unconscious. He was filled with sudden longing to touch her hand, to kiss her eyes, or her fragrant hair. For the moment every other consideration receded before that torrential instinct.

"Doris!" he cried, in a low, intimate voice. The divine madness had fallen upon him at last in all its primitive

strength. Gone were fine resolutions, chivalrous consideration; gone the very recollection of them.

"Doris," he panted, and encircled her waist with his arm. She did not resist him, but there was in her eyes a look of terror, of defeat, of disappointment.

"If I kiss her now she will hate me," he thought, and his brain reeled. "She will never forgive me."

Yet it seemed incredible that, holding her so close, he should relinquish her without at least one kiss. But the only germ of sanity that remained cautioned him again.

"If I kiss her now," he thought, "she will forgive me, but she will never think of me in the same light as before."

His pulses leaped; what did it matter—whether he destroyed romance and glamour and the high notion she hand of him? For a kiss, for only one little kiss, upon brow or cheek, upon hair or eyelid, or throat, he was ready to barter the heritage of a soul.

Still she did not move and, looking at her, he became aware that the look of alarm and defeat and disappointment had died away, and had been succeeded by a look of entreaty. Suddenly he understood; she was no longer afraid that he might kiss her; she was afraid that she might yield herself willingly to that kiss.

Quickly his sanity returned. He might destroy her faith in himself, but he would not destroy her own self-respect and peace of mind, so, without having kissed her, he released her.

For a full minute he paced the floor. Once he halted and gazed with unseeing eyes into the brown and golden glory of the September day. Finally he came back to her.

"Doris, when does Mrs. Pultney-Greene sail?"

"In a fortnight."

"Suppose you go with her?"

"Very well," she said. "I will go."

Thus, almost without words, was made one of the momentous decisions of their lives. She asked for no reasons, he gave none. Each understood perfectly the attitude of the other. Each tacitly acknowledged that to avoid temptation was sometimes the finer way.

Without speaking again, hurriedly, as if pursued by some horror, he left the room, closing the door behind him. Then he stood, leaning his wildly throbbing temples against the door. On the other side of that door was his wife, the wife whom he loved to distraction; he had every reason to believe that she had reached that highly charged state of mind when a few words, the natural product of his justifiable ardor, or a mere glance, or a handclasp would burn away the barrier between them. For a few moments he stood irresolute. Then, head erect, his face quiet and controlled, his eyes clear and calm, he walked out upon the porch to discuss with Mrs. Pultney-Greene Doris's wish to accompany her.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Matthew Ferguson Endures the Discomforts of Grass Widowership and Has a Violent Quarrel*

Doris remained abroad all winter. She wrote Matthew long letters that glowed with a rapture inspired by scenery, historic grounds, singular personalities, and odd customs. Moreover, she wrote him every day. She chronicled everything—little insignificant events, humorous everyday episodes, tragedies real or imagined, in brief, the entire flux of her life, as she lived it hour by hour, she recorded for him every evening before retiring. Deftly, with an adroitness which seemed to him little less than magical, she inserted the personal note, yet the note was of her own personality solely, and made no appeal to his.

Matthew Ferguson had never corresponded with a woman before, and he told himself that if he had read those letters of Doris's, addressed to anyone whatsoever, without knowing the woman who wrote them, he would still have fallen in love with her. As it was, the longing and homesickness which her absence occasioned knew no bounds. Half a dozen times during that winter he was on the verge of cabling her to return. Twice he wrote out the cables, keeping them on his desk all day while he worked. He stole furtive glances at them. He coquetted with them. He took them out of the drawer and held them between his fingers, and it seemed miracu-

lous to him that a few penciled words, composed of simple lines meaningless in themselves, should hold the potential power to recall his wife within a week. From which it will be observed that he had reached that stage of emotional exaltation when a naïve wonder at the inwardness of commonplace things causes a profound joy.

Then, at night, he would tear up those cables, destroying the magic power that dwelt in them, and walk out under a frosty sky or a drizzling rain, feeling hopelessly desolate and forlorn. There was no doubt that Doris would return immediately if he cabled her, but he knew —or thought he knew—that the old footing of friendly companionship would be impossible. If she came back it would be with the tacit understanding that he might begin his courtship. And that must not be thought of, as yet.

In January Doris wrote him that at a house-party of Mrs. Pultney-Greene's third cousin, a baronet in Sussex, she had met Grace Cravatt, who claimed to be an old friend of her husband's. Doris was delighted with Grace, and could not understand why Matthew Ferguson had never mentioned so charming a girl. Doris's letter ran on:

> "And good as gold; perfect as platina, I should say, for to set diamonds and the lighter hued stones in platina is the rage this season. Seriously, I wonder you did not fall in love with Grace, for truly, as between her and myself, she is much the better woman. Was she too good? Do appease my curiosity, dear Matthew Ferguson, and tell me why you never mentioned her."

Poor Matthew blushed crimson while reading this epistle. Doris's reference to Grace as the better woman made him as uncomfortable as if he had been found

with pilfered goods in his possession. He had only a vague notion of what a baronet's house-party might be like; but he supposed the women found time to reel off confidences by the yard. It was unthinkable, of course, that a woman like Grace Cravatt would tell another woman, the second woman being Doris, that she, the first woman, had been in love with the second woman's husband; but he had an uneasy conviction that there had been no necessity of telling Doris this, once she had talked with Grace Cravatt. He had a protective, big-brotherly feeling for Grace, even as against his own wife. He accused himself of disloyalty to Doris, but he did want poor, disappointed, brave little Grace to be allowed to keep her secret. The way some wives and husbands bandied about the names of former admirers and sweethearts seemed detestable to him.

It took him the better part of two days to devise an answer to that particular one of Doris's letters. First, he thought of ignoring the inquiry; then he attempted to answer facetiously; finally he wrote:

> "I do not know that I have any particular reason for not mentioning Grace Cravatt to you; in fact, I think I must have mentioned to you some time or other that Adam Cravatt had a very charming daughter."

Doris did not allow her curiosity or incipient jealousy to slip into the limbo of forgotten things even then. She replied:

> "I consider, my dear Matthew Ferguson, that you cast a slur upon my entire sex by speaking of Grace Cravatt as a mere *daughter*. Know, sir husband, that she is an individual, and I gladly hazard any

dubious impression which my persistence may make upon you for the satisfaction of repeating that I marvel at your blindness."

Matthew was not a man to be flattered, amused, or elated with a sense of triumph because he supposed that his wife was becoming jealous. He was amazed by the thought. Jealousy to him was not love's outrider, clad in shimmering garments of white and gold, but an undesirable vagabond, and to think that Doris might be jealous of him, who had vowed himself so gallantly to her service, was monstrous.

Then, in a twinkling, his thoughts were caught in backwater, and two facts stood out pertinaciously. He himself had more than once held parley with the undesirable vagabond.

His ears tingled. His conception of the spiritual tie in marriage was so exalted that he was distressed to find how it was hedged about with the purely human, and that, intrinsically, the same laws that apply in friendship, in filial affection, in every other human bond, apply in marriage also.

At that distance, it was impossible to say any more on the subject without becoming over-emphatic. He did not refer to it again, nor did Doris, who continued to write him letters full of charm. Some of these letters made him ache with disappointment because she studiously avoided every reference to himself that was not superficial, or purely casual. She never sounded the intimate note, never was there an allusion to any of the many episodes and events in their brief but momentous common past. Never did she address him as "Matthew" but aloofly, detachedly as "Matthew Ferguson."

As the winter wore away, and there was no change in Doris's letters, Matthew's bewilderment deepened into

perplexity. Her letters continued to come with unfailing regularity. Her good spirits never flagged, but she gave him no token of desiring to return. He himself manifested restraint in writing her. He felt that he had given her such abundant proof of his love that to express any impatience concerning her return would have been exerting undue pressure. The very fineness of his love made him appear a laggard, when, in reality, he was eating his heart out with the bitterness of the long separation.

One humid day in May, when the heat and noise, so suddenly unloosed, made men apprehensive of the coming summer's heat, he decided at last to give voice to the yearning that filled him. He hurried back to his office, meaning to send Doris a long cable. The cable was never sent, for on his desk there was a letter from Doris, telling him that Mrs. Pultney-Greene was seriously ill with typhoid-pneumonia. It was not to be expected of Doris that she would leave her faithful old friend in such a crisis; her letter breathed such solicitude and love for her aged patient that Matthew felt, with a pang of shame because he had upbraided her in his heart for her treatment of himself, that Doris was indeed the *ne plus ultra* of women.

A few days later, Matthew, returning from lunch at the Savarin, in the old Equitable Building, on turning the corner of Nassau and Wall streets, ran into a tall, gaunt man. The two men rebounded, apologized, then vigorously gripped each other by the hand.

"Stuart, old man, where are you keeping yourself?"

"In Boston, my friend. Down here for a visit. How are you and Mrs. Ferguson?"

"We are well, thank you. How's your novel coming on?"

"Oh, my novel has been published all right," Stuart drawled in the old, irritating way.

"Hope it was as unpopular as you wanted it to be."

Stuart became extremely lugubrious.

"It was not," he said, in a voice of deepest gloom.

"You don't mean to tell me you wrote a big seller?"

Stuart's dignity was indescribable.

"I did not," he said, "I wrote literature. That it turned out a good seller is not my fault; it really is not."

"I do not remember seeing your name on any book-cover," said Matthew, laughing.

"A pen-name, of course," Stuart commented. "You know, Ferguson, this was really a dreadful blow to my pride. I hope to do better next time. Of course, anything I write is doomed to have a big sale, now. That is unavoidable. If I did a play in blank verse the public would buy it. There would be no stopping them. I suggested to my publisher that we get out a limited edition only, of say four thousand copies of my next book, and state frankly in the advertisement announcing its publication that we intend to print no more than the first four thousand copies because the merits of the book are such that most people would not enjoy reading it."

Matthew inquired what Stuart's publisher thought of this novel scheme.

Stuart shook his head sadly.

"Publishers are so very mercenary," he complained. "Mine seemed to think my suggestion a huge joke, and had the bad taste to repeat what I said to some 'Cozy Corner' man, who printed the story in the department of his magazine as an example of my inextinguishable drollery, and said I was improving on Bernard Shaw's publicity methods, as witnessed in 'Pygmalion,' the play, you know, which Shaw refused to allow British managers to produce, but handed over to the Vienna *Hoftheater*.

At any rate, I hope my next novel will be thoroughly unpopular. I am doing all I can to that end. I have selected only the most ordinary, homely, common-place characters and episodes for my next book."

"But man-alive," said Matthew, "that is just what the public wants."

"Well," said Stuart, "that sounds hopeless. I was confident that ninety per cent. of the purchasers would fling the book aside in high dudgeon without reading it."

"My dear Stuart," Matthew objected, "I thought you were an honest man."

"And have I done anything to make you change your opinion?"

"Look here—you know the public is going to buy your new book on the strength of the reputation you gained through the first. Now, instead of realizing that you owe it to the half million of folks who put down their dollar and a quarter for your new book to give them a story which you fancy will be as entertaining as the first, you deliberately set about handing them a story which will be dull and heavy."

"I thought," Stuart said, earnestly, "that my first book was dull and heavy. But you see I was mistaken."

Matthew bit his lips to check another explosion of his risibilities. He did not wonder that the "Cozy Corner" man had referred to Stuart's "inextinguishable drollery."

"You have no idea how vexatious it is," Stuart continued, "to have every silly little miss you meet look at you with adoring eyes, and then chirp"—Stuart here mimicked the manner of a girl in her teens, with a falsetto voice—"'Oh, you are the author of "The Holocaust," aren't you?' Oh, no, I must turn out a solid book to save my self-respect."

"And haven't you reached the third ring of the circus yet?" Matthew asked.

"Well," said Stuart, "I thought I had. It is true she did tell me that she adored my book and, as 'The Holocaust' had taken the popular fancy, that should have opened my eyes to her true character. But I was weak enough to think that she read it with my eyes, that she appreciated the more difficult passages, not the series of episodes on which it is necessary to hang the characters, and which signify nothing—nothing at all."

"And did she disappoint you?"

"Would you believe it, Ferguson? When I asked her to point out the passages which appealed to her most, thinking of course that she would indicate the loftier passages, she told me she had not read the book at all. *She had made someone else tell her the plot!*"

Matthew fairly shook with laughter.

"Nor was that all. She thought, evidently, that what I desired most was to be popular," Stuart concluded belligerently, "so that is how I did not come to enter the third ring of the circus."

"Well, it is too bad," Matthew offered by way of solace.

"Yes, it is. Here I am, with my unpopular novel still to write," said Stuart.

"Now let me see," said Matthew, in a helpful voice. "I told you a long time ago that, if I were to write a novel, I would first of all analyze all popular novels, and make a chart of the ingredients they contain; then, by comparing the factors in which they concur, I would arrive at the qualities which make for popularity. Now, if I wanted to write an unpopular novel, I would do the same. Having prepared my chart, I would eliminate all popular themes."

"Hm," said Stuart.

"And the first theme to be eliminated," Matthew con-

tinued, "would be the third ring of the circus. You must do away with love."

"Good Lord," Stuart exclaimed. "Isn't that precisely the thing I did in my first novel? I made the hero a man who had never been in love, and my publisher said that was what made the book—the idea was so original."

"Well," said Matthew, "try the same trick again. It wouldn't be original the second time, you know."

"Well," said Stuart, "to be frank with you, that is just what I did."

"And, in addition to eliminating love, eliminate romance," said Matthew.

"That, again, is what I did," said Stuart. "You have no idea how hard it was to find a character answering those requirements. I had to find a vocation, first of all, that bars a man from love and romance."

"Yes," said Matthew, musingly, "the world is very full of both, is it not?"

"It's replete with them," cried Stuart, disgustedly, "but I got my character at last. He is a pedler."

"A pedler?" Matthew inquired in surprise.

"That's what I said," said Stuart, tartly. "A man who goes from door to door vending little tuppeny articles that nobody wants."

"Um," said Matthew Ferguson.

"Could you think of any less romantic character on which to hang a story?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"I don't believe you could. I went through all the trades and professions in the world, and I came to the conclusion that a pedler was the most unromantic character I could find."

"How about a plumber?" asked Matthew.

"A plumber? A plumber is well enough; but a plumber has a permanent home; and, if a man has a per-

manent home, he has friends; and, if he has friends, he just possibly might have a sweetheart."

"It would not necessarily follow," protested Matthew.

"No, but he might," said Stuart.

"How about an undertaker?" asked Matthew. "An undertaker, now, has always seemed to me the most unromantic character in all the world."

"Not at all," said Stuart, sturdily. "An undertaker's business is to bury people; he buries somebody every day in the year. Now, in burying hundreds and thousands of poor souls, he just might be called upon to bury a woman he had loved long ago."

"That would not be imperative," said Matthew.

"No, but it might happen," said Stuart, triumphantly. "It just possibly might."

"Well, then," said Matthew, "there is a tramp. To my thinking, a tramp is vastly more unromantic than a pedler."

"You're mistaken," said Stuart, "a tramp sleeps in a barn and in haystacks and feeds where he can. If he were a good-looking tramp, there might be a dairy-maid or a scullery-maid or some other poor feminine creature with a heart all famished for a bit of love, and she might take a fancy to the good-for-nothing fellow, and feed him every day, and put an old mattress in an out-house for him, and he might be in league with some other good-for-nothings, and steal the new-born calf or set fire to the barn, or rob the strong-box in the house. And then, again, the tramp might be the old farmer's long-lost son, and the old man, on discovering the pseudo-tramp, might threaten the servant who had given him food and shelter with immediate dismissal, and then, on learning of the tramp's identity, he might relent and take his son to his heart. And then, of course, the son would marry the kind-hearted scullery-maid, and they would live hap-

pily ever after. That would be a fine how-do-you-do, wouldn't it, for a story supposed to have neither romance nor a love interest?"

"But all that need not happen to a tramp," said Matthew.

"No, but it might happen to him," cried Stuart, "and that is the point. So long as a thing might happen, it can happen, and what can happen, being possible, is probable, and therefore barred. So I couldn't make my hero of a romanceless tale either a plumber, or an undertaker, or a tramp. Nothing remained except to make him a pedler."

"I don't see it," said Matthew, quite heatedly.

"A pedler," said Stuart, "is the only man under the sun who might live a long, useless life and never have a love affair."

"I don't see it," objected Matthew again.

"But I see it," said Stuart, excitedly, "and it is my novel."

"Look here," said Matthew, "I figure it out this way. A pedler travels about a good deal——"

"You're not a writer of stories," said Stuart, petulantly. "You really know nothing whatever about it."

"I know what you taught me just now," said Matthew, pleasantly, "and an able teacher makes an apt pupil. A pedler travels about a good deal, just like a tramp——"

"Pardon me," said Stuart, with icy politeness, "they travel about in a very different way. It's of no concern to the tramp where he is so long as he finds shelter and food, gratis, as I proved to you. By remaining in one place, a romantic attachment between him and the scullery-maid becomes possible. But a hard-working, God-fearing, self-respecting, utterly useless pedler goes on and on, without stopping——"

Matthew interrupted him gently but firmly.

"I do not see that the pedler embodies perpetual motion in human form any more than does the tramp. For instance, he might break his leg——"

"He mightn't," said Stuart, almost angrily, "he mightn't."

"He might," persisted Matthew.

"Well, my pedler doesn't," quoth Stuart, greatly wroth.

"But some other pedler might," persisted Matthew, "in all fairness you must admit that, if I were writing a story, my pedler might behave differently from yours, because other things might happen to him and because his temperament might be different."

"Temperament!" exclaimed Stuart, "temperament in a pedler! What *can* you be thinking of, Matthew Ferguson?"

"My pedler might have a good deal of temperament," said Matthew. "In fact, he has. It's his temperament makes him try to stop a run-away horse, and in doing that the unfortunate fellow breaks an arm. And the girl he saved, who was a teacher in the district school, takes him to a little cabin in the woods, where she and a little boy whom she had been in love with in her school-girl days had played together. And she tells the pedler this story, without letting him know that the dream of her womanhood was that the little boy, who had been brought to the village only for his summer holidays, would come back some day to claim her as his bride. By and by she finds out that the pedler was remarkably cultured for a mere vender of useless trumpery; then he tells her that he is really a scholar who undermined his health by overstudy, and, having no means, he took to peddling so that he might earn his livelihood while living in the open air. Then, last of all, the pedler tells the schoolteacher that he is the identical little boy with whom she played in that

cabin long ago. There," Matthew concluded venomously, "you can see for yourself that a pedler might be the most shockingly romantic character of all."

Stuart was almost in tears.

"I really do not know what you mean by meddling with my affairs," he said. "I worked very hard and patiently trying to find a character into whose life neither love nor romance would enter."

"My dear fellow," said Matthew, gently, "don't you see that there is not a soul on earth into whose life love and romance do not enter, unless they shut it out by force? It cannot be otherwise, my dear Stuart. You—even you—will find that the third ring of the circus is your ultimate destination. Just write a good old-fashioned tale of love and sacrifice and heartache, with a lot of joy and happiness at the end, and rest assured, though it sells prodigiously and is read by every Tom, Dick and Harry, by every Anne, Mary and Joan, no matter how far below the literary standard the story may fall, you will have accomplished something of which no man need be ashamed, for you will have enriched the world with a vision of the pain which comes to all who love; of the kindliness which all receive and almost all give; of the happiness of which most of us taste freely and deeply."

Stuart looked at Matthew doubtfully.

"I've only half-forgiven you," he began, "for upsetting——"

"Nonsense," said Matthew heartily, slapping him upon the shoulder. "Nonsense, Stuart. When will you dine with me at the Club?"

"Any day you say," said Stuart, "but, look here, Matthew, I do not wish to appear impertinent, but won't you ask me to your home instead—so I may have the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with Mrs. Ferguson?"

"Didn't I tell you that Mrs. Ferguson is abroad?" Matthew asked. "She has been abroad almost ten months."

"Almost ten months?" Stuart's ingenuous countenance was a perfect register of his emotions, and Matthew saw that he was intensely surprised.

"Yes, why not?" he asked.

"Oh, certainly," said Stuart. But the honest fellow could not force from his face the look of intense amazement.

"What is it, Stuart?" Matthew asked, kindly.

"Nothing," stammered Stuart. "Only this. Mrs. Ferguson must have gone abroad shortly after you were married."

"About six months after our marriage," said Matthew.

Stuart made a decided effort to keep some indication of his thought out of his remarkably expressive face. Matthew felt hurt. He liked Stuart, and Stuart's surprise that Doris should be abroad so long seemed like an adverse criticism on Doris. And this he resented.

"Evidently you do not approve of my wife's staying abroad."

"It's none of my business," said Stuart, bluntly.

Matthew's vexation got the better of his judgment. He was determined, now, to force Stuart to commit the indiscretion from which honest Stuart, who was an odd conglomeration of artlessness and shrewdness, was making a manly effort to abstain.

"I wish you would say frankly what you think, Stuart," Matthew said. "Reserve does not become you. Say what you mean and have done with it."

Stuart's words came from tensely compressed lips.

"It's simply this, Ferguson. Is it wise to allow your wife to remain away from you so long?"

Matthew flushed darkly.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean—nothing."

"You mean something, Stuart. You'll have to say what you mean, now."

"Are you trying to quarrel with me?" asked poor Stuart. "We are old friends, aren't we? All I mean is this. Mrs. Ferguson is an attractive woman, and she is a highly emotional woman, or, heaven forgive me, Matthew, would she have married you within six months of her first husband's death?"

Without speaking, Matthew stared frigidly at Stuart, who stood, sucking in his breath, nervously.

"What else?" asked Matthew, at last.

"Haven't I said enough?" cried Stuart. "Are you very angry with me? I hope not. You pressed me to speak, and I did, and I'm already half-sorry I did, for there is no man whom I esteem more highly than yourself."

"Though I did marry my wife with premature haste," said Matthew, with a harsh laugh.

Poor Stuart cried out at that.

"You cannot be so unjust as to be offended with me for speaking my mind. I realize fully that you and she were placed in exceptional circumstances. Nevertheless, a woman who forgets one husband in six months, just—possibly might, you know, forget another in a year."

Matthew's brilliant smile hid the pain which his friend's unjustified comment caused him. He put out his hand, conciliatorily.

"I see you are at your romancing again. 'Just possibly might!' But it doesn't follow, Stuart, that she will. What's your address, by the way, so I can write you to make an engagement for our dinner?"

Stuart gave his address, and Matthew, after jotting it down, left him with a jovial word of parting, but for days and weeks even, the sting of Stuart's words per-

sisted. They wove themselves into the undercurrent of his daily routine of living and thinking. An insidious fear had taken possession of him; it was not jealousy, for he suspected no individual of alienating Doris's affections; it was not mistrust, for he accused her of nothing. It was just a vague, numb, unformulated fear that moved in illimitable chaos.

Gradually, however, as the days went by, this chaotic fear sought a nucleus about which to gravitate. He located it in the Sussex baronet's house-party. He was young and unmarried, and his sister kept house for him. Doris had written that both were charming. She had also attached a full list of the guests at the house-party for Matthew's edification, for every third person present had a title of some sort, a circumstance which afforded Doris, who was intensely democratic, much amusement. Matthew had merely glanced at the names at the time Doris sent them. Now he rummaged through the entire package of letters to find it, and, when he found it, he fairly devoured the names. They told him nothing. Captain Crawford might be as old as Methuselah, or a man of his own age; Lord Dunnellen might be in his dotage or a gay Lothario. Sir Frederick Exeter, Bart., might be a decrepit old landowner or a handsome stripling; the "just might be's" were as indefinite and vague as Stuart's romancings.

Thereupon he reread that particular one of Doris's letters in which she had enclosed the list, to see if it contained any references to the titled personages mentioned, and he learned with satisfaction that Captain Crawford was a sort of Rawdon Crawley, Lord Dunnellen a billiard-ball-headed octogenarian, Sir Frederick Exeter a blushing, stammering youth. One name only appeared on the list to which Doris made no reference, the Marquis

of Luxbridge; and he, accordingly, became henceforth the storm center of poor Matthew's thoughts.

Mrs. Pultney-Greene was many months in throwing off her illness and in convalescing. It was toward the end of October when Doris finally wrote him that her friend was entirely well, whereupon Matthew wrote her his long-deferred request to come home; but, in re-reading it, it seemed much too lover-like and ardent, and he blue penciled it unmercifully, so that the final version was a very mild, calm, dispassionate letter, indeed. Doris replied in similar vein; if anything her tranquillity at thought of her home-coming was greater than his—or appeared so.

Matthew realized acutely that Doris and he must meet almost as strangers. They had been separated for over a year, and a year is a long time at twenty-two and thirty, her age and his, when the character is pliable and keenly susceptible to every new impression.

When finally he stood at the pier where the steamer was to dock, surveying the faces along the railing of the slowly shifting vessel, he was as excited as a small boy who sees an incoming ocean liner for the first time. He caught sight of Doris long before she saw him. A tall, handsome man of military appearance was at her side, speaking to her incessantly, and, though she seemed to answer and smile, Matthew, who had studied her play of features so narrowly, saw plainly that she was scarcely listening to the tall, dark man who was doing his best to entertain her. Under her perfunctory smile her features were taut, and showed tense expectancy. Matthew's heart seemed to vault joyously within him upon seeing that expression on her face. It gave him a sense of delicious triumph over the handsome man, because, with all the effort he was making to hold Doris's attention, she gave him an indifferent ear only.

The steamer had actually docked and the gangplank was laid before Doris saw Matthew. She herself was just about to step upon the gangplank when she caught sight of him. The lovely rose-blush which he remembered so well swept over her cheeks and brow, and her charming face looked dazzlingly beautiful. Several persons, in spite of their preoccupation with their friends, turned to look for the person toward whom that superb creature was running, and Matthew tingled in every nerve with the delightful sense of possession. For was she not his?

She put out both her hands to him, and he held them for a moment, then, without a word, they disentangled themselves quickly from the crowd. Matthew's car was waiting and the chauffeur opened the door for them.

"Doris," Matthew said, "I am going to take you right home. Tommy will attend to the trunks for you. Have you anything dutiable in your trunks?"

Doris handed him a slip of paper containing a list of the declared articles, and a few minutes later they were speeding from the dock.

Alone with Doris in the car at last, a sudden shyness came upon him. She neither turned her head away from nor toward him, and the very indifference of her attitude seemed to raise a barrier between them. He did not know what to say to her. He wished that she would help him, as he shook in a sudden tremor of timidity. Speech became imperative, and yet loomed before him as an impossibility. Finally, in desperation, he spoke at random.

"That's a new building on the corner, Doris. Thirty-five stories, and ten in the tower. It is said to be fireproof."

She flashed him a look, flashed it so quickly that he could not read its meaning. Then she yawned lightly,

prettily, daintily, and languidly tapped her gloved fingertip upon her lips.

"Very interesting."

He flushed and became angry. He felt an incredible desire to shake her, to treat her roughly—to cause her physical discomfort. Mute and raging, he sat at her side, making no effort toward conversation even in thought. Without looking at him, she spoke in a voice that still further inflamed his wrath.

"Buildings are not the only fireproof things in this city, are they, Matthew?"

"What else?" he asked, thickly, groping for some hidden meaning.

"Oh, ships and docks, and—would you believe it, Matthew—furniture? They've found ways and means of making furniture fireproof, too, I understand. By and by they will make human beings fireproof, also. Don't you think so, Matthew?"

He mumbled some reply—something to the effect that he had never speculated upon it. His wrath was abating, for he had perceived, all of a sudden, that she had addressed him by his first name only, a thing she had never done before. She had an odd way of pronouncing his name, making a complete cleavage between the two syllables, thereby giving the harsh, stern old Biblical name a sonorous, throaty, intimate sweetness which ravished him. He longed to hear her say it once more.

Silence again wavered to and fro between them, like a heavy fog.

"Do you ever speculate upon anything, Matth-you, but law, and high finance, and philanthropy?"

He shook off the last vestige of his anger. He felt that if he continued wrathful he would make himself ridiculous.

"Oh, occasionally I speculate upon other things."

"Well, that is very interesting, Matth-you."

"The things I speculate upon are interesting."

"I wonder what they are, Matth-you. Are they anything like the captions in the Sunday Magazines or the Children's Encyclopedia—like this, you know: 'Why do cross-eyed people see you when looking the other way?' 'Why do you get chilblains in winter and not in summer?' Are the things you speculate about something like that?"

"Well, not exactly, Doris. I will give you an example. I've been speculating on the things you and I would say to each other after a year's separation."

"And did your speculations—come true?"

"Not exactly, Doris."

"And are you disappointed, Matth-you?"

Again the whimsical hiatus that vibrated through him and set every nerve aquiver. This time he noted that a sweet, caressing, lingering inflection on the first syllable gave the syllable an air of possession, of proprietorship, her proprietorship of him.

She repeated her question.

"And are you disappointed, Matth-you?"

"Things may be different, Doris, without disappointing us."

"That's an evasion, not an answer."

"I do not know that I am."

"That means that you are, or you would have no hesitation in telling me that I am much nicer than you remembered me to be."

"You are just as nice as I remembered you, and my recollections all clustered about a superlatively fascinating woman."

"Well, Matth-you, only a superlatively fascinating man could have said that."

"But——"

"Don't spoil it now, Matth-you, please——"

"But—I have forgotten what I was going to say."

"Have you really, Matth-you? Or have you thought better of it."

"Truly, I forgot. When you look at me like that, Doris, I forget everything."

"Then I must not look at you—like that—for there are many things I want you to remember."

"What, Doris?"

She smiled up into his face and dropped her eyes before his.

"I, too, have forgotten what it was that I wanted you to remember," she murmured.

He glanced down at her, as she sat with downcast eyes, the deep golden fringe of eyelashes lying softly against the golden hirsute veil that shimmered over her skin. He liked the English clothes she wore, and he reflected that, instead of looking a year older, she looked younger because of a glow and an energy of health that permeated her. That she did not look older made him more shy, more timid with her. It was unbelievable that this girl was his wife; it was unbelievable that she had been a widow when he married her.

The automobile stopped and he helped her out. She ran to her room immediately, and when, a few minutes later, she tripped into the sitting-room where he was waiting for her, she came and stood before him with a roguish, mischievous little school-girl look in her wonderful eyes—her hands crossed behind her.

"Doris," he cried, passionately, "are you a wee little bit glad to see me again."

She looked at him quickly, and in her voice there was a rancor and a resentment which he did not comprehend.

"I hardly know if I am. You know, *you* sent me away a year ago——"

"I did not send you away," he interrupted her, fiercely, "we agreed that it was better for you to go."

"You asked me as a mere matter of form. I had to obey you, didn't I?"

"Obey! That word should never pass between us, Doris."

"And in this year I have learned to control my wishes and emotions. I expect to do as my lord and master bids me do. That is all."

He stood before her aghast and bewildered. Seeing him thus, she burst into a merry laugh. Her laughter revealed her exquisite throat, and he remembered the little characteristic gesture she had of throwing her head back in laughing.

"Doris, if you did not want to go abroad, why did you go?"

"Because we are told to do a thing and do it," she said, with a sudden change of mood, speaking coldly and distantly, "it does not follow that in doing it we act contrary to our own wishes."

"Doris, what sort of an answer is that?"

"A very good answer."

"A hard, cruel answer."

"Then is she hard and cruel who made it?"

"No, but she is not herself to-night."

"You knew her only slightly. You knew her only under extraordinary circumstances. Perhaps, for the first time, you look upon her real self to-day."

"I'll swear I do not," he said.

"You may be wrong at that," she replied, coolly.

"Do not sidetrack me, Doris. I ask you, and I beg of you to reply truthfully: If you loved me then, why did you go away?"

"Love you! I did not love you then, Matthew Ferguson."

With a pang he noted that she gave him his full name again.

"Doris," he asked, between gentleness and anger, "do you love me now? If so, I beg of you be frank with me."

She laughed. She walked a few steps, then stretched herself agilely like a cat that has lain in one position for a long time. She fell into no ungraceful posture. She did not extend her arms or hump her shoulders, or crane her neck. She seemed merely to dilate herself by some subtle, indwelling power.

"If I did not love you then," she asked, scornfully, "how could I love you now, not having seen you since until this hour?"

"We—corresponded," he said, lamely.

She laughed.

"Oh, Matth-you," she said, softly, "your letters were so entrancingly interesting! And so comprehensive, and so charmingly lover-like."

His cheeks flamed.

"I am not a good correspondent," he said, stiffly.

"No," she said, "you are not." She shook her head soberly. "But there is another art in which you are even less proficient. You are a very poor lover."

"Doris," he cried, in an agonized voice, "do not torment me. Surely, you are my wife."

"There is no denying it," and she sighed.

A horrid fear swept over him. Her sigh had been so cruel.

"If you do not love me, Doris, do you love some other man?"

"Um," she said. "*Must* a woman love some man?"

"You seem like a woman in love."

"Have you such great experience in picking out women who are in love?"

"Doris, why not be frank—and serious?"

"Frank—and serious! Oh, Matth-you, how hopelessly good you are."

"Why hopelessly?"

"Why not?"

"Doris, when I married you, I told you that if you wanted your freedom in a year's time, or in two years' time, you could have it. I ask you now, 'Do you want it?'"

She went to the mantel and deliberately turned her back on him.

"Do I want my freedom?" she repeated. "Do I want it? If you tell me to take it, I must obey."

He could have wept with the torment of it. And yet, because the nape of her neck was good to look at, that torment was changed to bitter-sweet rapture.

"Doris," he said, "you know I love you."

"You think you do," she flung over her shoulder.

"It is the same, is it not?"

"You are very young in some things, Matth-you."

"Will you not turn your head, Doris, so I can see your face?"

"Now why should you want to see my face?" she protested, in a puzzled tone. But she turned her head, as he had asked her.

"I want to see your face," he said, "because to me it is the most beautiful face in the world."

"You overwhelm me, Matth-you."

"It may be," he continued hastily, "that I have offended you by being too backward in my wooing. If so, it was fear of offending you that made me seem a laggard in love. I beg that you may believe me."

"Oh," she gasped, her face a deep crimson. "My sensibilities are quite as fine as yours." She was very haughty. "It would have offended me."

"Then—dearest."

"Dearest!"

"May I not call you so? You are dearest to me in all the world, even if you care nothing for me."

"Really, you are absurd."

"Hopelessly good and absurd. What else?"

"A lot of things," she affirmed, coolly, "which are beside the question."

"Doris," he said, speaking with gentle swiftness, "I say once more, if I offended you by showing lack of ardor in my letters, forgive me."

She flung back her head and laughed. Her laughter was exquisite. It purled and rippled. It was soft and creamy. It gave the effect of effervescent water suddenly unloosed from the vessel which had subdued its buoyancy.

"You are delicious," she said. "You ask a woman's pardon for not making love to her." And again that wealth of laughter bubbled from her tongue.

His face was crimson with the humiliation she was putting upon him. He had a swift recollection of the day at Diberto Manor when it had occurred to him for the first time that he would not always have the upper hand with her. But he had not dreamed of such a crushing defeat.

"I am behaving like a bumpkin," he said. "My love for you makes me clumsy."

"I did not know that love makes men clumsy," she said, laughing.

"Doris!"

"You have not the vaguest notion, Matth-you, of what love is. You reason and argue. You think yourself wonderfully self-controlled and wise when, in fact, my poor Matth-you, I am afraid there is no feeling whatever in your heart to control and check."

"Oh, Doris!" he said, miserably. She threw him a quick glance. There was a smile on her lips, and he thought the smile cruel and scornful.

"When one is in love, Matth-you," she explained, gently, "one does not try to check the flow of the mighty love that throbs in one's heart. The words of love will out, and there is no power on earth that can stop them. There is a waywardness, a mischievousness, a delight in feeling oneself in love, my poor Matth-you, and a wildness, a brusqueness, a fierceness as well that breaks down all barriers, or vaults over them."

He stood and looked at her, too miserable to formulate a protest. Was this his Doris, his own Doris—who had professed such gratitude, who had promised that gratitude would beget love—who was now saying these bitterly cruel things to him? Her sweet face was the same, her dear voice was the same, her lovely brown eyes, with the motes of gold weaving themselves through the brown of the iris, were the same. And yet she was not the same. She seemed encased in briars and brambles.

"You are unbelievably cruel, Doris," he said.

"My poor Matth-you——"

"Do not call me 'poor,'" he said, fiercely.

"Very well. My enviable Matth-you——"

"Nor am I enviable," quoth he.

"Very well, my good Matth-you——"

He fairly snorted with rage.

"You'll oblige me by eliding all adjectives as appendages to my name," he said, curtly.

"You are my master, whom I must obey. I am not cruel, however. I am kind. You desired to protect me against myself, if I should find in a year's time that I could not love you. Now, I, Matth-you, not to be outdone in generosity, desire to protect you against yourself, for I am quite certain you do not really love me."

"I do love you," he said, indignantly. "I fancy I may be trusted to know my own mind."

"You are self-deluded, my poor, no, I mean, my good, no I must not say that either. You are self-deluded, my Matth-you."

"Let us cut this agony short," he said, curtly. "I demand a direct answer, and surely you will admit you owe me that."

"Owe you? Owe? Oh, I owe you very much, Matth-you. But is it kind of you to remind me of that?"

"Doris, since you refuse to tell me whether or not you are in love, I will put my question this way. Did you, while abroad, meet any man who seemed to care for you?"

"'Seemed to care?' Oh," she gasped, and pressed her hands against her bosom, as if to quell some irrepressible turbulence. "Would it surprise you very much, Matth-you, if I had met one or more men abroad who seemed to care for me? Am I so very unattractive, and ugly, and old, that you cannot conceive of any man's really caring for me?"

"Enough," he said, now thoroughly angry. "You purposely misunderstand everything I say. I am a fool to—to——"

"To what, Matth-you?"

"I do not know," he said, sulkily.

"What a shocking temper you have; haven't you, Matth-you?"

"I asked you a question, Doris, and I insist upon having an answer. I am your husband, and I have a right to know."

She sat down and folded her hands in her lap; then lifted her head with a gesture of coy demureness; her lovely brown eyes looked into his pleadingly, beseech-

ingly; she was the picture of outraged, injured innocence.

"Matth-you," she said, and the sweet little hesitation over the second syllable seemed to go to his head like old wine. "Matth-you, have I ever refused to obey you that you should speak to me like that? You told me to go, and I went. You told me to come back, and I came. You told me to answer a question, and I would answer it, Matth-you, only—I have forgotten what you wanted to know."

"I want to know," he said, "if you love the Marquis of Luxbridge."

"The Marquis of—I have forgotten the very name."

A change came over her face. She did not laugh, but series of smiles traversed her cheeks; they undulated from upper cheek to lower lip and back again, like waves, because her merriment did not vent itself in laughter. Her eyes deepened in color; they looked sly, alluring, knowing.

"I do not remember him at all," she said.

"You do, you do!" he said, viciously, kicking a corner of the rug. "I can bear losing you—or rather, losing the hope of you, for we cannot lose what has never been ours. But I want a direct answer."

A look of alarm came into her eyes. She rose and, standing beside him, placed her hands on the lapels of his coat. Her eyes were soft and warm and dewy.

"I remember him, now, Matth-you," she said. "He was seventy, and bleary-eyed, and wore a pair of dueling mustachios, which earned him the nickname of the 'Walrus.' No, I do not love the Marquis of Luxbridge."

He looked down at her, and suddenly there was vouchsafed him a glimpse of the truth. She had meant to torment him, because she loved him, and because he had seemed so cool, but she had taken fright the moment she

saw that he was really angry. For she did not mean to lose him.

So far, so good. His excellent judgment counseled him to hold himself well in hand; that she was his at the moment, for the asking—if he asked in the right way. But some other force, suddenly unshackled in him, which he did not know and could not have named, rose up and cried to him that he must make her suffer in return for the torment to which she had put him; and this new hateful, baleful force, though his saner judgment opposed itself against the unexpected intruder, suddenly toppled over judgment and sent it sprawling to the wall.

Swiftly he caught her to his breast. He enveloped her like a whirlwind. There was the fury of the tempest in the arms that clasped her, and he kissed her upon eyes and hair and cheek, on throbbing throat and fluttering eyelid and tremulous, sweet mouth. And she did not resist him.

Judgment whispered in his ear, "Let well enough alone. She is yours. Be satisfied, then, and do not let a petty sense of injury sustained, or of wounded self-love, goad you into saying things which will send her bounding out of your arms, where she rests now, as if they were indeed her home, her refuge, and her strength."

But the intruder cried out to hurt her, by saying nothing of his love for her, by dwelling only on her love for him.

"You cannot deny that you love me, you witch," said he, "and because you were ashamed to tell me that you loved me you said such cruel things to me. You are very desperately in love with me, aren't you?"

With one soft, strong hand—he wondered that a hand could be so strong and so soft at the same time—she pushed away his face and sprang from his arms.

"Love you!" she cried fiercely, so fiercely that he could

scarcely believe that this was his gentle Doris, then recollected the quick spurts of gusty anger which occasionally swept over her. "Love you! I hate you; I despise you. I cannot find words to express my contempt for you."

"Doris!" He was thoroughly alarmed by the hurricane for which he was responsible.

She stamped her foot.

"Desperately in love with you, indeed!" she cried. "I tried to be gracious in paying the debt I owe you, of which you so thoughtfully reminded me."

His anger overflowed. That she, like himself, was saying furious words with intention to hurt occurred to him as a possibility, but her reference to the obligation she was under made him smart as if flicked on the raw. He spoke with dreadful coolness, his anger at white heat.

"Since you have at last told me how you feel toward me, permit me to tell you that you shall have your freedom as speedily as an annulment of our marriage can be procured."

He walked rapidly to the door. At the threshold he turned and had a fleeting glimpse of her. She was standing in the middle of the floor, her hands clasped against her bosom, a blank look of surprise on her face.

He crossed the threshold. In the hall he halted with a sense of utter desolation and bewilderment. What had they quarreled about? Whence had come all the fury they had heaped upon each other? How had it all started? He felt as if her hands were reaching out after him to draw him back into the room where she was standing, erect and amazed, in the middle of the floor.

Was his dream of happiness over?

With something like a sob he went to his room.

## CHAPTER XVII

*Matthew Ferguson Finds That "Kiss and Be Friends" Is Sometimes the Best Policy—Even if the Kiss Is Missing*

After a wretched night, Matthew left the house very early the next morning in order to avoid Doris. He had sat up into the small hours of the morning, wondering what would be the outcome of this—their first lover's quarrel. All day he was unable to do any work, and he lounged about, harassed by morbid fancies. His most persistent fear was that Doris might have left the apartment, never to return. At three o'clock the suspense became intolerable and he went home.

He found Doris tranquilly embroidering in the bay-window of the sitting-room, with such an air of comfortable familiarity that any stranger, seeing her thus, would have vowed that particular spot, at that particular hour, with that particular work was the habit of years.

She wore a simply made frock of Persian silk, trimmed with a mass of white lace and a profusion of black velvet and small steel buttons. She looked very young and lovely, and, considering what they had been through the evening before, quite indecently happy.

"May I inquire for your health?" he inquired, for want of a better opening.

"Thank you, I never felt better," she assured him. "And what a beautiful day it is, isn't it, Matth-you?"

There was a suspicion of mockery in her eyes as she remarked upon the weather, and the little air of superior wisdom which she assumed set his nerves to tingling. It was evident that she was not in a vindictive mood, nor did it appear that she was going to demand her release haughtily; for had she not called him "Matth-you"?

Matthew's nerves must have been in very bad condition, indeed, for this meekness of hers, instead of filling him with joy, enraged him anew. Such is the inconsistency of man. A moment before he had trembled lest he find her gone. Now, finding her safely ensconced, in the most silken and conciliatory of moods, he was filled with new fury.

"I am glad you are well," he said, "for it gives us a chance to discuss the matter of your release."

She raised to him inscrutable eyes of uncomprehension.

"Release from what, Matth-you?" she asked, sweetly.

"Release from—me."

"Release from you, Matth-you?"

"Annulment of our marriage, Doris."

She changed color, but the expression in her face, tantalizing, demure, wholly bewitching, did not change. Bending low over her embroidery, she took another stitch.

"I had hoped that you did not really mean to carry out your threat of last night," she said, gently.

"Did I threaten you, Doris?" Her calmness was communicating itself to him. His tattered nerves felt the balm of her manner, of her voice, and of her personality. He drew up a chair and sat down opposite her.

"Yes, Matth-you, you were particularly cross with me."

"And you were very bad to me."

"You threatened to rid yourself of me, Matth-you."

"You said you hated me, Doris."

Two turtle-doves, billing and cooing, could not have presented a more amiable picture.

"I did hate you, Matth-you, at the moment I said that."

"And I did mean to give you your release, Doris, at the instant I offered it."

"And are you going to give it to me, Matth-you?"

"If you wish it, yes. Otherwise no."

"I do not wish it, Matth-you."

His heart beat with joy. Here was victory indeed, a victory of which, now that he had won it, his generosity did not appraise him worthy. He took her hands in his. He was so certain of her complete surrender that, true-hearted gentleman that he was in spite of the twenty-four hours of futile fury in which he had indulged himself, he meant to linger over each precious anticipatory moment, so that she, too, might taste the sweetness of her dominion over him.

"Then, Doris, you make me very happy. Happier, dear wife, than I can say."

But he had not considered that the old Adam in him, which had been rampant but a short time before, had its equivalent in the old Eve in her. Her hand in his, palm against palm, a look of adorable innocence in her eyes, she said: "How could you think that I wanted to be released, Matth-you? If I am untagged property once more, Colonel Chalmers would be sure to hear of it and stake his claim in some way or other."

His revulsion of feeling was so great that he dropped her hand with a gesture which, although wholly unconscious, was decidedly rough.

"Oh, fool, blind fool, culpably blind fool," judgment whispered, "do you not see that she, too, lingers over the sweetness of the game in order to extract every drop of the delectable honey of suspense? Gratify her innocent feminine vanity, tell her you love her, take her in

your arms, let your golden tongue prove itself worthy of that appellation by lulling her into glorious acquiescence."

But wounded self-love opposed itself.

"If fear of your uncle is the only reason you desire to continue to pose as my wife, there is no reason why the separation should be postponed. You are in excellent health now, and able to take care of yourself."

"Nevertheless, Matth-you, I am afraid," she said, in a voice expressive of the utmost comfort and well-being.

"I am afraid you will have to learn to overcome your cowardice."

"But—I feel so nice and safe and comfy as—your wife."

"In figuring as my wife, you mean."

She said nothing but, looking into her face, he saw that every trace of the mockery, the tantalizing witchery, and the general devilment which had disguised the Doris he had known and loved of old was wiped away. He knew at that moment that, at heart, she was intrinsically and fundamentally the same sweet, good, single-minded woman she had always been.

Oh, fool, blind, culpably blind fool, do not risk losing a life-time of happiness for the sake of gratifying wounded self-love!

But wounded self-love, which vanity termed magnanimity, goaded him on in the path of disaster.

"I was busy with other matters to-day," he said. "To-morrow I will begin proceedings for securing the annulment."

Her face quivered. He saw that she would not allow her woman's pride to get the better of her humility and tender raillery.

"You—you refuse to allow me to remain your wife!" she said. "Consider, Matth-you, as a divorced woman——"

"Not divorced, Doris."

"It comes to the same thing in the eyes of the world."

"You will live the scandal of that down."

"It would be exceedingly distasteful to me."

"That is lamentable, of course, but I see no way of sparing you all the disagreeable business of life."

"You surprise me, Matth-you."

"My regrets," said he.

"Because, you have spared me every disagreeable experience so far—therefore—Matth-you—you have spoiled me—quite monstrously."

He saw that she was fighting desperately to maintain her composure. All his anger melted away. He felt shamed and embarrassed.

"Doris," he said, "do not let us blight our lives because of a silly misunderstanding. If you are satisfied to have it so, things shall remain between us as they have been."

"You are very good, as always, Matth-you."

"And you do not hate me, Doris?"

"Not the least little bit."

He was not deliberately blind now, but he was afraid, mortally afraid, with all the fineness and nobility which was the basic quality of his true self, to take more than she cared to give him at the moment.

"Doris?"

She waited, and he struggled with the words which would not come right.

"How do you feel toward me, Doris?" he stammered, finally. "Will you tell me?"

She went very white, and then flushed furiously. After all they had said to each other, he realized immediately after asking his clumsy question that he could not expect her to take the initiative in an avowal of love.

"Our feelings," she said, in a low, soft voice, "are like

a little feathered boy that poises himself lightly on one foot until he has decided in which direction to leap. To one side is friendship and to the other side is love. And he is ready—at any time—when properly coaxed——"

She broke off. He took her hand in his and kissed it gently. It was cold as marble.

"Doris," he said, "the little feathered boy shall be properly coaxed."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *Matthew Ferguson Concludes That the Ways of Woman Are Beyond the Comprehension of Mere Man*

The coaxing was not as easy a matter as Matthew had supposed. He was obsessed with fear that he might take undue advantage of her generosity, and her manner toward him obfuscated his usually clear vision.

At times her lightness of manner approached perilously close to the rocks of mere levity. Never had he been so perplexed by any human being as he now was by Doris. He had always prided himself upon his ability to read the human heart, but for once he found that his vaunted ability failed him. He could not arrive at any definite conclusion as to Doris's true character. Had she masked her real self when she seemed gloomy, morbid, introspective, or was she masking her real self now under the guise of lightness and even levity? Or was her true self a happy medium between the two, a woman cheerful yet possessed of profound depths, sincere, yet not devoid of playful humor? His faith in her was illimitable, and in his heart he was convinced that his latter estimate was the right one. That she was good he never doubted. And he placed no narrow restriction on that term. To be a good woman meant so many things, and implied so many qualities. It implied kindness, charity, gentleness, unselfishness over and above the palpable use of the word.

Curiously enough, at times when he was driven almost to despair by her playfulness, while he was hungering to plumb her inmost depths of feeling, he saw a guarantee of her goodness in her friendship with Grace Cravatt, who had returned to New York a month later than Doris. The two women were inseparable friends. They shopped together, they visited picture galleries and matinées together, and, Matthew suspected, they conducted their charities together.

He reproached himself bitterly for again using Grace Cravatt as a criterion with which to judge his wife. Then he exonerated himself by saying that the psychic as well as the physical strain under which the unusual situation placed him must serve as an excuse for him if, at times, his thoughts were not quite at par. His conduct he knew was irreproachable.

His part of attentive lover he played excellently. Flowers, books, bon-bons, jewelry, all the delicate bribes to affection which are politely termed tributes to a woman's charm, he punctiliously produced in lavish amplitude. Doris accepted them in various ways. Once she showed inordinate appreciation, again indifference. Her behavior was consistent only in that it was never the same on two consecutive occasions.

Early in November he remembered when half-way down to his office that he had forgotten an important document at home. He ordered the chauffeur to turn about and take him home again. He went immediately to his own room, the door of which stood ajar. Matthew had a light step and the heavy Axminster carpet deadened it still further and, on entering his room, he started back in amazement. Doris, oblivious of his entrance, was seated in front of his bureau, in the attitude of one who has come to stay for a long while. The top drawer was open, and Doris was examining his ties, one by one.

As he still adhered to his color scheme of plain brown, the ties were all of that color, though they were not all of the same shade. His amazement was so intense that he stood motionless, watching Doris mutely, as she softly stroked first one tie and then another. Once she lifted a tie, which he recognized as one which he had discarded that morning, and laid it against her cheek and pressed it softly against that dear spot for a longer time than his lips had ever dared to linger. He remembered distinctly that he had thrown it into the wastepaper basket that morning, and he wondered that Doris should have rescued it. He could not guess for what purpose. The entire proceeding dumfounded him. Suddenly Doris lifted the tie to the level of her face. Her head bent low over it and, watching her in the mirror, he could have vowed that her lips touched caressingly the piece of silk. What, in heaven's name, did it all mean?

"Matthew! Matthew Ferguson!"

No soft hiatus in her pronunciation of his name that time!

She was on her feet—all her dewy loveliness gone—confronting him with a very red and angry face.

"What do you mean, sir, by spying on me?"

"Spying on you! Why, Doris!"

"Spying on me, yes, sir! Why did you come back? What business have you at home during the day?"

"I—I forgot something," he stammered. "I had no idea, of course, that you were in my room."

"Your room! *Your* room!" She was superb in her scorn. "Is it kind to emphasize that?"

"Indeed, Doris——"

"If I found you in my room on returning home unexpectedly, do you think I would consider you a trespasser——"

"A trespasser—I never——"

"You might have imagined that I am just a little tired of staying in the same old sitting-room and the same old bed-room—my bed-room I mean—day after day."

"I have begged you to let me take a larger apartment."

"So that you may be safe from my intrusions, I suppose!" Matthew likened her manner to thistles, barbed wire, and brambles. But thistles are made of soft down on the inside, and barbed wire is harmless if you know how to handle it, and he remembered that even brambles have their use.

"I suggest that you lock your door after this," she continued, in a perfect frenzy, "so that you may be sure I do not enter your room while you are away. Oh, I repeat, you might have imagined the simplest thing—that I was tired of the other rooms, instead of putting the worst construction on my presence here."

"The worst? Really, Doris, I haven't the remotest idea what you are talking about."

She began to stammer and falter. Her anger gave way to sudden confusion. The red and white alternated on her cheeks as clouds veil the sky and the sky immerses clouds on a gusty but sunny April day.

"What—why—you must suppose something—as regards my being in your room," she faltered.

"Why, Doris, my dear, I admit that I am puzzled, and know not what to think."

She sighed. The red vanquished the white in her cheeks. Her eyes, those wonderfully beautiful orbs of shimmering golden brown, were gems of liquid glory.

"Puzzled, Matth-you, and know not what to think?"

"Utterly at sea, Doris."

"And—and—do you not ask for an explanation?"

"Indeed, I do not, and indeed, upon second thought, you have already given it."

"Sometimes, Matth-you, you can be marvelously nice."

"And you, my dear, can sometimes be marvelously cross."

"Was I very cross, Matth-you?"

"Cross! Oh, hear, hear!" he exclaimed, laughing.

"I believe I was cross. I beg your pardon."

"There is no need, Doris."

"I think I will trespass no longer on your premises." And very haughty, and erect, and stately, she swept from the room.

"Doris!"

She turned on her heel at the threshold.

"Do you not wish to take this tie which you rescued from the wastepaper basket?"

"Why should I, pray?" Her face was scarlet. "It's a dingy, faded, threadbare thing. I wonder, Matth-you, that you should wear so shabby an affair."

"Indeed, Doris, I threw it away this morning."

"You wore it last night, sir. You cannot deny that."

"But I threw it away this morning."

"You should have thrown it away weeks ago," said she, very loftily.

"Had I done so, Doris, you could not have found it."

"What a loss I would then have sustained!" Her lips curled with disdain.

"It seemed to please you mightily, nevertheless," said he, with a haughtiness which was a brazen travesty of hers.

"Pleased me," she mocked. "Pleased me! Now will you kindly inform me, sir, what made you think that?"

"Because, Doris, you pressed it to your cheek and I think, though I am not certain, that you kissed it."

"Kissed it!" She burst into a peal of sweet laughter. "What ails the man? Would any sane woman kiss a piece of dingy, threadbare silk? Why, Matth-you, why should I kiss your tie?"

"I'm sure I do not know any more than I know why you held it to your face and that, assuredly, you did."

"Then—there are a lot of reasons for doing that."

"Indeed?"

"Certain fabrics, Matth-you, although you may not know it, are said to possess capital curative qualities for neuralgia, when rubbed against the skin."

"Doris, have you neuralgia?"

"And then again I might have held it against my cheek because I pitied the poor thing."

"Why should you pity it, Doris?"

"Because, only yesterday, you carefully brushed and housed it; and to-day, only one little day later, you throw it away, as if it had never been of use to you, or given you pleasure, or helped your appearance!"

"But, my dear——"

"And so I pitied it, Matth-you; because I could sympathize with it, for once, Matth-you, not so very long ago, you wanted to get rid of me just as you got rid of that poor little desolate, forsaken silk tie."

She came back into the room and stood close before him. There was something indescribably sweet and soft and ingratiating about her, and, following a sudden impulse, he bent down and kissed her twice upon the lips. Then, frightened, lest he had angered her, he drew back.

"Matth-you!"

Her liquid voice brushed against his tingling senses like a caress.

"What—Doris?"

"Have you really no idea of my reason for looking at your ties?"

He smoothed his hair with his fingers nervously. He felt that much depended on his answer. His audacity had forsaken him, and all he felt was fear of giving her offense. An illuminating thought came to him.

"It might be that, because my birthday, which you always remember, is at hand, you wished to match the exact color of my favorite tie. You may have wished to work me a tie—or a waistcoat."

She did not reply, and, when he looked at her, he saw that she was very angry.

"I am so sorry that I spoiled your surprise," he said, contrition in his voice.

She stamped her foot. "Oh!" she cried, and "Oh!" again.

"Why, Doris, it does not matter that much, does it?"

"Oh!" she panted. The scorn in her voice was boundless. "It does not matter at all."

"I see that I have blundered, Doris, but, indeed, it was the only explanation I could think of—and you insisted—I am very sorry."

"So am I. Very!"

"I will forget that I saw you with the tie."

"Do," she said ironically.

"I am trying to make amends," he said humbly.

"Amends!" she flung at him.

"I think I will find the document for which I came and go to my office," he said. "And, now believe me, dear Doris, I——"

"Don't say it again or I shall scream," she panted.

"Very well," he said and ran through his file for the paper. He found it and, when he looked up, she was still standing there. Her anger had vanished and a lovely smile, in which there seemed amusement as well as friendliness, hovered on her lips.

In passing her he stopped and touched her fingers to his lips.

"Am I forgiven?" he asked.

"Yes, entirely." And quickly, before he knew what she was about, she took his head between her hands and laid

a kiss between his eyes. Then, turning, she fled from the room.

He left the apartment a dazed man. All the way down to his office he wondered whether he would ever learn to comprehend Doris, who once had seemed so direct and simple and who now was such a living exemplar of complexities and inconsistencies.

## CHAPTER XIX

*Matthew Ferguson Wonders Whether the Infallible System, When Tested, Will Really Prove Invulnerable*

At first the semi-monthly meetings of the Powers had seemed an incomparable pastime to Matthew. There was, indeed, a strong element of humor in these meetings —the unexampled exhibitions of Furlow's bovine good nature, which always irritated fastidious little Beecham into giving vent to uncontrollable fits of temper; Adam Cravatt's ever stately behavior; and Judge Witherspoon's unshakable composure. Added thereto was the by no means disagreeable sensation of being an integral part of that which directed and guided two of the largest Eastern railroads.

As the newness faded from these meetings they began to pall on Matthew. Cravatt's stately diction seemed horribly prolix in a man who should have known the value of time; Beecham's irascibility seemed plainly childish, while Furlow's vulgarity reeked of the saloon, and worse. Judge Witherspoon remained the one redeeming factor, the only person of that strange crew with whom it was a pleasure to foregather, and who, so far, had made no discreditable proposals, no shady suggestions for further enriching the road at the expense of the public at large.

As yet Matthew had not soiled his hands. But he

never answered a summons to one of these sessions without feeling that, on walking out of Cravatt's private office, with its sumptuous leather and mahogany furniture, its heavy rugs and costly paintings, he might come forth a man ruthlessly marked as the active agent in some noisome transaction.

He found a summons to attend a special meeting at Mr. Cravatt's office that very morning at eleven. He had barely time to get to Mr. Cravatt's office, so, flinging a few essential instructions at the faithful and competent Tommy, he hurried away.

When he entered the leather and mahogany sanctum a half-hour later he found the entire conclave assembled and waiting for him.

As usual, Furlow's cigar was hanging from his teeth, his thumbs were thrust into the armholes of his waistcoat, and he was lounging in the most ungraceful of postures.

"Kept us waiting five minutes, Ferguson," he grunted.

"Sorry," Matthew said curtly.

"May I offer you a cigar, Mr. Ferguson?" inquired Mr. Cravatt solicitously, in a tone as low and soft as might be employed in a death chamber. That offer of a cigar was part of Mr. Cravatt's ceremonial as dean of the assemblage, and, although he knew perfectly well that Matthew did not smoke, he never failed to supplicate him to take one of the fifty-cent Havanas contained in the cut glass, silver-topped jar.

Matthew declined the cigar as ceremoniously as it had been offered.

"Ferguson," said Furlow in a stentorian voice without in any way changing his position or removing the cigar from his mouth, "we want your advice to-day on a matter somewhat out of the ordinary routine." An enormous volume of smoke rolled from between his teeth.

"Want me to present the case, Cravatt?" Furlow inquired. Adam Cravatt, the biggest railroad man in the East, inspired no awe in Furlow's voluminous bosom.

"If you please, Mr. Furlow," said Mr. Cravatt in his stateliest tones.

"If I might be permitted to interpolate a remark," said Little Beecham, rubbing his hands and looking toward Cravatt with the air of servile deference which had earned him the name of Cravatt's jockey.

"Certainly, Mr. Beecham," conceded Mr. Cravatt.

"Then," suggested Mr. Beecham, "I would suggest, Mr. Furlow, that you state the case as briefly as possible, as I have a train to catch at one o'clock." As he spoke he poured himself a half-glass of whiskey, filling up the glass with seltzer.

"Lots of time till one o'clock," puffed Furlow.

"Not for a man who has a lunch to get first."

"Oh, get your lunch on the train."

"No dining-car attached," said Beecham crossly.

"Well, smoke an extra see-gah and do without lunch."

"If I do that," said Beecham petulantly, "I shall surely have a headache. And I cannot afford to have a headache because I cannot think shrewdly if I have a pain in my head. Mr. Cravatt will bear me out, I'm sure; won't you, Cravatt? And, besides, I don't smoke cigars. I smoke cigarettes."

"It seems to me, my dear Mr. Beecham," said Mr. Cravatt dryly, "that, for a man who is in a hurry, you are a spendthrift in time."

"Egzaggly," puffed Furlow. "Egzaggly. Keep quiet, Beecham, now, do, and I'll get through with this demmed business in a jiffy."

"Well, don't hurry too much," said Beecham ironically, lighting a cigarette. He then laid five cigarettes on the mahogany beside his glass of whiskey and soda and, while

he talked he played incessantly with these five cigarettes, arranging them in parallel lines and in crosses and in pentagons. "If you hurry too much, Furlow, you'll be sure to forget the important points."

"Oh, Ferguson'll get me all right. Ferguson ain't no fool, even if he doesn't smoke see-gahs."

"Look here, Furlow," said Beecham, who seemed particularly morose, "I do not like your continual references to cigars. And why you cannot say cigars instead of see-gahs like a civilized Christian being I cannot comprehend. I am sure Cravatt will bear me out; won't you, Cravatt?"

"I beg to express the opinion that we are wasting time," said Mr. Cravatt, stolidly dignified.

"There you see," said Mr. Beecham triumphantly. "Cravatt bears me out. You are wasting time——"

"I?" snorted Furlow, removing the cigar from his mouth at last. "Well, I'll be jiggered. Who's doing all the gabbing, I'd like to know, you or me?"

"Well, I do not like your speaking, as you habitually do, as if all men who don't smoke see-gahs were imbeciles. Also, you should have said 'you or I' and not 'you or me.'"

"Just you take no liberties with my grammar," roared Furlow.

"I will," said Beecham promptly, "until you quit taking liberties with grammar in general. Besides——"

"Besides you're an f.o.m., Beecham."

"What's an f.o.m.?" Beecham inquired. "I know what a D.M. is and I know what a C.O.D. is. But I never heard of an f.o.m."

"An f.o.m. is a fussy old maid," said Furlow.

Beecham was speechless with rage.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Mr. Cravatt began, "I entreat

you to consider that we are wasting time which might be profitably employed."

"One word," Beecham sang out. "I do resent Furlow's insinuating about see-gahs——"

"You take it from me," Furlow interrupted, pointing one squat, tobacco-stained finger at the wildly gesticulating Beecham, "if you stopped smoking those demmed coffin-nails and smoked honest see-gahs instead you'd be a demmed sight better off in your upper story."

"Preposterous! Cravatt, I appeal to you——"

Judge Witherspoon rose from his chair. His mere presence, when he chose to make it conspicuous, possessed the power to awe men. Furlow and Beecham subsided into their respective chairs.

"We will proceed with the business of the day," said the Judge calmly.

The two belligerents glared at each other with bellicose eyes.

"It's this way, Ferguson," Furlow said. "We, all of us, you understand, are interested in next year's campaign. As the chairman of the People's Welfare Party, I want to trot out some popular measures, measures, you understand, that are calculated to catch the popular fancy. Now—what have you got to propose, Ferguson?"

"There are two measures that appeal to me off-hand," Matthew replied. "First of all, the old vexed question of white slavery."

"Been done to death," said Furlow.

"It is, however, a subject of perennial interest. The other measure is a Child Welfare Committee."

"There's a Child Welfare League in existence now," interposed Mr. Cravatt.

"I am aware of that," Mr. Ferguson replied. "The work of our Welfare Committee would be somewhat different from the League's work. Our aim would be to

feed and clothe the children of parents too desperately poor to provide proper food and clothing."

"Very expensive," said Furlow. "Can't be done."

"We can get around that. We will say frankly that, if the city is too poor and the taxpayers are too selfish to provide the funds, we will make an appeal for private subscriptions. Besides, I imagine the city coffers may be made to yield the necessary money. You see, our party—what's its name——?"

Furlow supplied it and Matthew continued with his argument.

"The People's Welfare Party will tolerate no graft, no misappropriation of funds. And the Budget is elastic, and, if necessary, can be and must be made to include the requisite funds."

"There ain't enough schools," objected Furlow. "That'll be thrown up against us by the soreheads who object to the Copenhagen system. When I was learned to read and write I went to a district school and got four months schooling a year and I can read and write as well as anybody."

Beecham sighed. He was eager to make the obvious retort, but he restrained himself and said instead: "My principal objection to the Copenhagen system is that it keeps the teachers employed only half a working-day—four hours' time, while they are paid full time. Like to see the rest of humanity getting fat full-day salaries for a measly four hours a day."

"Oh, I say, let them poor teachers live," said Furlow. "Ain't you going away to-day yourself on the noon train?"

"I strenuously object to your tone," said the irritated Beecham.

"Getting sassy again, f.o.m.?" puffed Furlow.

The Judge rapped the table with a pencil.

"I venture to suggest," said Mr. Cravatt, "that, beyond peradventure of a doubt, a terrific hue and cry will be raised in certain quarters about paternalism."

Matthew Ferguson laughed.

"I do not believe, Mr. Cravatt," he said, with the utmost good nature, "that even those papers which you read, the *Evening Post* and the *Sun*, would charge that as counting against us, whether they support us or not. If they do make the charge we can remind them through whatever organ we control that there was a time when the public school system was decried by certain human fossils as rank paternalism. If the state now recognizes the right of every child born on its territory to receive an education, then, it seems to me, that same state should recognize, not as a secondary, but as a primary, fundamental and most sacred claim the right of every child to proper nourishment and clothes, since the mind, if it is to profit by instruction, must, as is evident, reside in a healthy and properly cared for body."

"That's a bully good argooment," Furlow emitted a perfect volley of smoke. "I vote we accept Ferguson's suggestion."

"One moment," said Mr. Cravatt smiling. His smile was hideous. He was so thin that every bone of temple and jowl was revealed when he smiled and his lips shrank back from his teeth, giving him a canine aspect. "There is another thing to be considered. Ahem!"

He stopped and everybody looked at him in surprise. He smiled and resumed: "You are aware, Mr. Ferguson, that every little while we kill a child on our Nth Avenue Road?"

"Yes," said Matthew shortly, "I am aware of that, of course."

"You have been fortunate so far." The hideous grin of the President of the Interstate Railway Company was

more hideous than ever. Matthew knew by that odiously protracted grin that Adam Cravatt was about to say something particularly unpleasant. "One child only was killed in the two years since you began to act as our attorney and the claim was never handed to you because, at the time, we had not publicly avowed you as our attorney. Of course, you are aware that we have run only one train a day on Nth Avenue during these two years for reasons of franchise, as the old freight depots along the river front were torn down. But, as soon as the new freight depots are finished, we may have to run as many as four trains an hour down Nth Road. The infant mortality will increase accordingly along that thoroughfare."

"If you realize that," said Matthew contemptuously, "why don't you get your corps of engineers to work out a way of running your trains in such a way that no lives will be endangered."

Mr. Cravatt smiled his ghoulish smile and said nothing.

"The *Bulletin* suggested such a plan," said Matthew. "I think the suggestion was made three years ago, when you were running two trains an hour and, on an average, killed one child a month."

"The plan was not feasible," said Mr. Cravatt. "I am surprised, Mr. Ferguson, that you should take seriously any suggestion made by that despicable sheet."

"Why despicable?" Matthew inquired blandly. "And why not feasible? It is true, Mr. Cravatt, that to build an elevated structure would cost your road a good deal of money, but you know as well as I that neither you nor any other railroad has a right to run trains with steam engines through a city street. Years ago Jersey City and Newark forced the Erie and the P. R. R. to construct an elevated structure to carry their trains through the

city, and, permit me to say, sir, that it is high time the Interstate Railway Company followed suit."

"There is this very excellent reason against the plan which seems so admirable to you, Mr. Ferguson," said Mr. Cravatt, grinning so voluminously that his molars were laid bare, "that it would cost us a terrific sum. It is much cheaper, Mr. Ferguson, to pay an indemnity of perhaps one thousand dollars, or even two thousand dollars, per capita for every child that is careless enough to get itself run over than to build the structure which you suggest. If we killed one child a day, Mr. Ferguson, it would be cheaper to pay such an indemnity than to build an elevated structure."

Mr. Ferguson's indignation overflowed. Forgotten were Scientific Egoism and the elaborate system which he had invented as a bolster against just such occurrences. In the heat of his anger, Mr. Cravatt, with his terrible death-head grin, seemed a deliberate murderer. A cartoon, printed by the *Bulletin* during that paper's crusade recurred to Matthew. The cartoon had depicted Death as a skeleton in clothes, the skull alone unclad and grinning, acting as engineer for a Death Train down Death Avenue. So profound were his indignation and his contempt that, in retrospection, that Death head seemed to him a likeness of Cravatt himself.

"Am I to understand, Mr. Cravatt," he inquired, "that your pocketbook forms the sole consideration by which you guide your conduct in this matter?"

Mr. Cravatt placed the fingers of either hand point against point, as if praying. A more ghastly comedy Matthew Ferguson had never seen.

"I do not wish to accuse you of an unhealthy sentimentality, Mr. Ferguson," he said mildly, "but you must acknowledge, my dear sir, that you knew our record before you accepted our offer to make you our attorney.

Your worst enemy could hardly accuse you of being gullible. Did it never occur to you that we were anxious to have you as our attorney, and, after your successful handling of the Alpha Line case, to acknowledge you as our attorney, because your record in the philanthropic field in a way would have not only an excellent moral effect on our enemies, but would silence all strictures which your spectacular self might otherwise have passed upon us with reference to this particular offense?"

Matthew Ferguson sprang to his feet. For one moment he was too angry to speak. In his excitement he began pacing the floor. Cravatt's words were entirely justified, for had not his whole career, based on the Infallible System of Success, been a deliberate and conscious bid for the favor of some influential magnate or alliance of magnates, for the precise reason which Cravatt had stated? Personal humiliation in having been read so easily by a man whom he despised as heartily as he despised Adam Cravatt made the moral issue at stake grow dim for the moment.

"Mr. Ferguson!"

Judge Witherspoon's quiet tone of authority brought Matthew back to his chair.

"If Mr. Cravatt will pardon my criticism, it seems to me that he has expressed himself infelicitously and with unnecessary harshness. You are aware, of course, Mr. Ferguson, that the president of every large organization has duties toward a hundred different interests. He has a duty toward the stockholders, a duty toward his employees, a duty toward his patrons—in this case the traveling public—and a duty toward the public at large."

Matthew Ferguson regarded the Judge intently. The two legal men had an unqualified respect for each other and for each other's professional ability. Matthew had spent more than one hour in the library of the Judge's

home, browsing among the rare old volumes with his distinguished host. Judge Witherspoon was not a rich man, in spite of his singularly influential position in the community, but his library was his one great luxury.

"Mr. Cravatt's kindness to the men whom he employs is well known," the Judge continued. "The Interstate Railway Company pays its men better wages and works them shorter hours than any other road. Mr. Cravatt's sense of his obligation toward the traveling public is such that, in a decade, only one serious accident has occurred on his road. There remain his duty to the stockholders and his duty to the public at large."

"And his duty to the stockholders is paramount, of course," Matthew inquired scornfully.

"It certainly is, for the same reason that any man upon whom depends the weal of a body of people is liable for the welfare of that body as opposed to the welfare of all other similar bodies outside his own organization. If the interests of that specific body can be furthered only by sacrificing the interests of all other bodies, then the interests of the alien bodies must be sacrificed. Such is the law of self-preservation, Mr. Ferguson, in public life as well as in the life of the individual."

During this peroration Matthew had not once taken his eyes from the face of the older man, who had honored him with his friendship at a time when he himself was the merest nobody and who had gone out of his way not once but a hundred times to do him some kindness.

Moreover, for the twenty years in which the Judge had occupied his seat on the bench no breath had ever been raised to question his integrity, his honesty, his probity. Matthew Ferguson had that profound and unassailable respect for him which it is possible for a professional man to feel only for a man of his own profession, because only a mind similarly constituted and similarly

trained can fathom the difficulties, professional and ethical, that beset the path of that particular profession.

This respect for the Judge held Matthew silent. He was not by any means convinced that he was wrong, but he was willing to be convinced.

"To be more precise, Mr. Ferguson. If such an elevated structure as you propose were to be erected the earnings of the road would be materially decreased for from three to five years. The holders of the preferred stock, of course, would not suffer. The improvements would be paid by the holders of the common stock, many of whom are persons in moderate circumstances, and to whom a reduction of dividends from the seven per cent. which their money is now earning to the one or even one-half per cent. which their money would earn under hypothetical conditions would be a great hardship."

Matthew Ferguson bit his lips. Was the Judge right or was he merely a more clever trickster than the rest? It was a new experience for him to feel mentally abashed. He decided to hear the Judge out before saying anything at all.

"You perceive," the Judge continued, speaking in the same aloof, scholarly manner, "that, in spite of Mr. Cravatt's crudity in making his point, he is entirely justified, morally and ethically, in taking the stand he does."

"A human life is a human life," said Matthew doggedly.

Mr. Cravatt opened his mouth as if to speak, but the Judge, with an imperious gesture, motioned him to be silent.

"We have no quarrel with you on that score, Mr. Ferguson," he said. "Mr. Cravatt is the last man to risk a human life unnecessarily. The engines will be equipped with every safety device known; the engineers all will be eight-hour men—that they may not be on duty when

tired; our outrider will carry a bell and blow a whistle. All that humanly can be done will be done to safeguard the lives of the unfortunate youngsters who, for lack of a real playground, are forced to amuse themselves in the city streets."

"Still, Judge," said Matthew Ferguson, "you know and I know and every man in this room knows that some of those hapless youngsters, just because they are youngsters, will get under those cruel trains and be crushed to death."

The Judge looked very grave.

"Mr. Ferguson," he said very quietly, "it is one of the most lamentable, one of the most deplorable adjuncts of the methods employed by civilization, methods, you must remember, which conduce to the comfort of every individual in the community, that a certain loss of human life through accidents appears to be inevitable. Every decent-minded person aims to reduce to a minimum that loss of life. The building of the elevated which you propose would take at least two years to erect and would entail a loss of life of from six to eight men a year. Such are the ghastly statistics. These figures do not allow for cave-ins, falling of superstructures, breaking of cranes, or other accidents, any one of which, or all of which, may occur and may sweep away a number of lives. All this is terrible to contemplate. You perceive, then, what with the loss of life inevitable during the construction of such a structure, and the probable loss of life of children on Nth Avenue, if we continue to run surface trains, we are between the devil and the deep sea.

"If we were to build the structure you propose, in addition to the certain loss of life—and remember that the lives involved are the lives of bread earners and not of children—there is the loss of dividends which will fall wholly upon the common stock. Now, I happen to know

a considerable number of holders of common stock, through a case which was tried before me some years ago. I will enumerate a few. There is, first of all, a consumptive bookkeeper who is unable to work and who holds about ten thousand dollars' worth of stock. He has been getting seven hundred a year out of that on which meager sum a wife, himself and three children manage to subsist. Could they live on one per cent. of that ten thousand dollars? Other stockholders are retired school teachers, clerks who have lost their health, and so forth.

"You are a fair-minded man, Mr. Ferguson. You must consider these facts."

Matthew rose and walked to the window. Was the Judge indeed sincere, or a hypocrite? Matthew was suffering a revulsion of feeling that filled him with moral nausea. He did not wish to believe ill of the Judge. Self-interest urged him to accept at face value every statement the older man had made. Common sense told him there was much truth in the Judge's allegations. Suddenly, too, the Great and Only System, to which he had given so little thought of late, arose and confronted him. "Fool," it said, "fool, is not this the day against which I have girded you?"

The men sitting about the table smoking and drinking and trafficking in the bodies of little children seemed horrible to him. Suddenly a force which seemed extraneous to him, since he had never before known of its existence, but which, at the same time, seemed the most intimate and personal and precious thing he had ever sensed, took possession of him. It was not reason, for it did not argue; it was not common sense, for it did not preach compensatory measures; it was not egoism, scientific or otherwise, for in it there was no thought of self. And this new impulse began whispering to him.

"Study the situation. Do not act hastily. As an individual you are helpless against this combination of men. Study them. Do not break with them now, but hold fast to right thinking, to your desire to do what is right, for that desire to do right will make you knowing in time. Nor fear to be a traitor to these men. No man is a traitor who is true to the divine essence in himself. You see darkly now, but out of darkness came light in the beginning, and to you, also, shall light be vouchsafed after a while."

They were all waiting for him to speak. "I withdraw my objection, Judge Witherspoon," he stated calmly.

"You perceive, therefore, Mr. Ferguson," Mr. Cravatt said, continuing where he had left off a quarter of an hour before, "why unpleasant consequences in the form of a new newspaper campaign might result if we became actively interested in a Child Welfare Movement. Our enemies would very naturally remind us that charity begins at home."

Judge Witherspoon frowned at Mr. Cravatt's rawness of speech. Furlow said something about thinking over white slavery. Beecham yelped with fright on seeing that it was after one.

Matthew saw it all as in a dream. At the moment he had one imperative desire only: to get out under the clean blue sky; to walk in the teeth of the biting, moist December wind, and to inhale the sweet outdoor air. He felt an enormous desire for simple and spiritual things. And the atmosphere of the room, actual as well as spiritual, seemed to stifle him.

They filed out of the room, Furlow and Beecham together, still quarreling; Adam Cravatt in stately solitude, for it was an open secret that the President of the Interstate Road had a Beau Brummelian idea that it made any man's fortune to be seen on the street with him. There-

fore, being a parsimonious soul, he always sallied forth alone.

The Judge, therefore, fell to Matthew, as often before.

"May I drop you at your house, Judge?" The day was Saturday, on which day the meetings were always held so that the Judge might be present.

"Thank you, no. I'm going to the Astor House to meet a friend."

"To the Astor House, then," said Matthew, helping the Judge into the automobile.

"Look here, Judge," said Matthew as they sped away, "I am not a rich man, but I would give every cent I possess to know whether or not you are sincere in what you said."

"My dear boy!" the Judge was apparently shocked by this brutal candor.

"I think you are sincere," Matthew continued. "I hope you are. I do not care to be self-deluded. It does not follow that I will not do a thing because I know it to be dishonest; but, if I do it, I like to feel that I have the moral—or immoral—courage to admit to myself that it is dishonest."

"I am afraid," said the Judge laughing, "that this time your courage, moral or immoral, is destined to go untested. Self-interest and honesty are on the same side of the fence."

The car stopped in front of the Astor House.

"Youth," said the Judge, preparing to jump out, "is a blessed thing. It goes about fighting windmills. I did that, too. Nor do I regret it. It's splendid exercise, inducing a generous flow of blood to the heart. But there is one thing you want to remember, my boy. Was it Coleridge or Thomas Carlyle who said that, if the Lord of Heaven offered him absolute truth in one hand and

truth tinctured with falsehood in the other, he would choose the latter, because absolute truth is for the Deity only."

With this Parthian shot, without so much as a glance over his shoulder or a nod of the head or a shake of the hand, the Judge was gone.

"To your office, sir?" inquired the chauffeur.

"No; take me down to Battery Park."

The man looked blank.

"To the park or the Custom House, sir?" he asked.

"To the park," said Matthew shortly.

His longing for elemental and fundamental things was not to be denied. The grass, as green as if December were May, and the sky, with its fleecy clouds, struck upon his jangling nerves as things of unbelievable beauty. He went across to the water front, walking along with head bared to the gale, unmindful that a short stretch of the walk was deserted because the water, with every inrush of the tide, shattered itself into splashing fragments upon the broad pavement. Suddenly the water, boiling as in a cauldron, seethed and hissed and reared itself into a snake-like, foaming pillar, and, with a mighty rush and a terrific roar, it cleared the wall, and, panting and harmless, the fangs of its fury drawn, it fell in wet desolation upon the flags of the walk—and upon Matthew. He was drenched to the skin.

Matthew laughed. It came to him that to buffet the elements, to combat their hostility, which was frank and open, would be joy unspeakable.

A second wave, taller than the first, angrier, and as black as ink, came dashing in and hurled itself upon him. This time Matthew drew back, shook himself and panted for breath, for the wave had struck him upon the mouth. A few street urchins crowed with delight at the discom-

fiture of the silly man who had not enough sense to evade the very evident wave.

He returned to his automobile as quickly as possible. His chauffeur eyed him suspiciously.

"Home," said Matthew, "and as fast as you can get me there."

He drew the rug closely about him, for the wind seemed to turn the moisture lying against his skin to icicles. A boisterous mood of physical exultation suddenly swept over him. He felt that in the moment when he had faced the threefold glory of gray water, blue sky, and bleak wind he had been consecrated to all things good and true.

And Scientific Egoism? He recollected it with a start. Was the Infallible System not infallible after all? Lucidly, as if illumined by lightning, he now saw the flaw in the System which ultimately must make it crumble away into nothing. Andrew had been right in his prophecy. Matthew had allowed himself the luxury of unselfishness in one thing—in love. In that particular his life had been spotless, selfless, pure. Neither Sir Galahad nor Bayard could have bettered his conduct. And this unselfishness in love, stretching out innumerable tentacles, had stealthily undermined and corroded the carefully reared superstructure of selfishness. The System had barely a leg left on which to stand.

He chuckled, closed his eyes, and indulged himself in the luxury of a day-dream. He felt miserably cold. He imagined himself ill with pneumonia as a result of his escapade and Doris, nursing him, brought to a realization of her love. Soft fingers she twined through his hair and soft kisses she laid upon his mouth. In her eyes flickered the golden brown love-light which he had once or twice seen there.

Why should he suffer for love of her if she could not be brought to admit that she loved him?

He opened his eyes as the car stopped and sprang from it, making his way to his own apartment as quickly as possible.

## CHAPTER XX

*How a Mysterious Visitor Blights Matthew Ferguson's Dearly Cherished Hopes*

"What in all the world has happened to you? Are you ill?"

"It's a long story," he said.

"Then," she said quickly, "tell it after you have had a hot bath. Not before."

This was the Doris he had fallen in love with, the Doris of his dreams, his ideal Doris at last! The alarm in her eyes, the sweet solicitude for him, moved him intensely. He hurried through a steaming bath, put on dry garments, and went to the sitting-room, wondering whether she would still show him kindness, or whether, after her first fright in seeing him in such an unwonted state, she would treat him with the raillery which had become customary with her.

Evidently her alarm had not died away. She had a hot lunch waiting—hot soup, hot tea, toast and a light dessert.

"You must eat nothing heavy after such a drenching," she said, sweetly authoritative. As she helped him to soup and buttered his toast for him and then covered it to keep it warm, she showed all the repressed delight which good women feel when ministering to the needs of those whom they love. Nor would she let him tell his

story until he had finished his meal. Then she asked for it, and inquired into every particular and detail, and Matthew, usually so reserved, gave her a circumstantial account of the occurrences of the morning, suppressing only the comment of Mr. Cravatt's which had so enraged him because of the explanations it would have entailed. Doris looked at him with admiring eyes as he finished, and it suddenly occurred to him that, because he had suppressed a part of the story, he had in reality been hypocritical with her. He had a momentary mad impulse to tell her all; but the impulse died away and he did not act upon it.

"What are you going to do ultimately?" she asked.

"That is precisely what I do not know," he said. "Luckily, there is no hurry. I can take my time about deciding. Three, perhaps four, years must elapse before the four-trains-an-hour schedule will be inaugurated and in the meantime I will study the situation so that when the time for a decision comes I may be in a position to act intelligently."

"I do not see that any money consideration can be valid where human lives are concerned," said Doris. "Of course, invalids need money to live, and so do the aged, and so do the disabled. And yet—if you could start such a Child Welfare Committee, Matthew, it would be a wonderful thing, and I would be glad to head the subscription with a substantial sum."

They looked long and lingeringly into each other's eyes. The moment was dynamic. They had met on grounds other than personal and had found themselves in accord. The potent power in Doris's face which Matthew had felt without clearly defining it became active and dominant; it seemed to expand and radiate an aura of strength mingled with goodness.

"I can do nothing now, Doris, you see that," he said

at last. "If I do not wish to offend the Powers neither you nor I must appear in connection with such a scheme."

"Yes, I see that," she said, "but you have set me to thinking, Matthew."

"Doris," he said, and, rising, came and stood beside her. He was about to tell her all that was in his heart, feeling that she would not reject his overtures to-day, when the bell rang.

He stifled an exclamation of annoyance.

"I dare say it is Grace Cravatt," said Doris rising and moving a little away from him.

"Are you expecting her?"

Doris laughed.

"No, she was expecting me. I was to meet her in the lobby of the Empire Theater, and I forgot all about it in my fright about you." Her eyes were brimming with love. "I dare say she will forgive me when she learns what kept me at home."

Matthew had not met Grace Cravatt since her return from Europe. By some strange chance, if, indeed, it was mere chance, she had never attended those receptions, balls, or entertainments to which Doris and Matthew were invited. As she now entered the room there flashed across his mind a recollection of Doris's suspicion and he wondered whether he showed embarrassment as he shook hands with Grace, whom, for once, he was not glad to meet.

Poor little Grace's agitation was pitiably easy to read. She made no attempt to talk after a perfunctory exchange of greetings, which she delivered in a very small voice indeed, but sat silent and motionless in the chair into which Doris had literally put her.

Her personality seemed even more modest and inconspicuous than usual.

Doris apologized for not keeping her engagement.

"Matthew went wool-gathering down at the Battery," she said, "and made wonderful resolutions with a capital R and got himself half drowned. So it was my wifely duty to efface the effects of the tidal wave which engulfed him by giving him a hot bath, a cup of hot tea, a plate of hot soup, and minister generally to his creature comforts."

"Oh, yes," said little Grace.

"So you will forgive me, won't you, dear?"

"Oh, yes," Grace repeated in a colorless voice.

"Why didn't you stay for the performance? You had your own ticket, you know."

"Oh, yes; that is, I was afraid something had happened to you," Grace contrived to say and subsided.

Doris struggled valiantly in single-handed combat with the conversation, for Matthew, for the time being, was quite as useless as Grace, and, while he stood with his back to the mantel, idly surveying the room, he marveled at the ease with which Doris was manipulating the situation. She talked heroically until she hit upon a subject which drew both Matthew and Grace into the conversation. And suddenly he realized that what had seemed to him mere fluent ease of manner was, in truth, that fine-grained courtesy of which the basic element is kindness. Doris had been talking against time all the while so that Grace might pull herself together, and she was doing it so naturally that no one would have suspected her of anything but feminine enjoyment in empty chatter.

He felt that if there was in his heart one spot which remained unfertilized by his great love that arid place was being made over into a patch of paradise. "If I only could clothe my feelings for her in poetic language," he thought, "I could win her." And he thought, not with jealousy but with a sense of grudging envy of poor Law-

rence Diberto, who, no doubt, would have burst into a fine frenzy of language and won Doris's approval.

The clock struck four and Grace rose to go. In her excitement she shook hands three times with Doris and twice with Matthew.

The moment Doris reëntered the room after seeing her visitor to the elevator he knew that the spirit of mischief, which lately had seemed her chief motive power, was ready, demon-like, to break forth.

"Really, Matth-you, I must say it. She is just the type of a woman with whom I should think a man like you—so big, masculine and protective—would have fallen violently in love."

"Well, you see I didn't," he retorted.

"Well, you needn't be cross about it. She is such a helpless little thing, and so timid and clinging, and so very womanly, Matth-you. She would never make love to a man whom she loved and who didn't love her, would she?"

Matthew was scandalized.

"Of course she wouldn't," he said indignantly, "she is a dear, sweet girl, and I wish you wouldn't ridicule her, Doris."

Doris laughed.

"Why should you defend her?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't I?" he asked stoutly.

Doris laughed again. It was a low, mocking, slightly malicious laugh.

"Usually, when a man defends a woman he loves her," she said. "But I have your word for it that you don't. But I cannot help being curious as to your reasons."

"Look here, Doris. She is your friend; do you think it fair to laugh at her?"

"Is it so very wicked to laugh at one's friends—just a little?"

"I think it detestable," said he.

Doris laughed again.

"What if I were not laughing at her at all, but at you?"

"At me? Why, in heaven's name, should you laugh at me, Doris?"

She came and sat down beside him and placed her hand on his arm.

"Perhaps I am laughing at you," she said, "because I am such a naughty, wicked, corrupt person that I cannot help seeing the humor in life along with its serious import. Once I forgot to laugh for many weeks, Matth-you, and you came and rescued me. And now that I have learned the art of laughing again, thanks to all you did for me, Matth-you, it is quite possible that I think it beautifully fine and noble for a man to refuse to tell even his wife that another woman loves him and is eating out her heart for him, as good women have a foolish way of doing once they have bestowed the priceless gift of their love."

"Oh, Doris," he said, "really——"

"You will not admit it, of course, Matth-you, but I know what I know. She did not tell me, dear, but the first time I mentioned your name to her and saw the light kindle in her eyes as she listened to—to—what I told her about you, Matth-you, I knew. There is no other light on earth, dear, that compares to the love-light in a woman's eyes—though you may not know that."

"I do know it," he said vigorously, "I have seen it."

Doris flushed softly, warmly, adorably.

"That is why," she continued hastily, "I feel so sorry for Grace Cravatt, though I never show it, for, though you, who live in the clouds, may not know it, it is a

very pitiful thing for a woman to give the only heart she has to bestow upon a good man who is as good and fine as you are, Matthew, and who does not love her."

"Doris," he cried, "does that mean——"

She rose trembling. Was the moment of surrender at hand? He stepped toward her, and then—Matthew, although a man of temperate habits, all but cursed. Marie, Doris's maid, had entered the room.

"Beg pardon, madame. Mrs. Blasher wishes to know if you will see her."

"Certainly," said Doris, "show her in."

Matthew walked to the window, wishing unprintable things about Mrs. Blasher, of whom he had never heard, and who turned out to be a small woman, so small a woman, in fact, that, had she been younger, better dressed, and pretty, she would have been termed *petite*. But whatever her age, and her figure seemed to testify against advanced age, she was weazened with malnutrition, shabbily dressed, and generally unprepossessing. Hers was the type which, in early youth, will set man by the ears, because of the amazing feat accomplished by nature in fashioning a complete flesh-and-blood woman in so diminutive a mold. She was timid, but she was ashamed of her shyness, which was the painful shyness of the poor who have seen better days and who have the burden of shame to bear in addition to the burden of poverty.

Doris went to meet her with a cordially outstretched hand. That cordiality of hers, extended to this poor wreck of womanhood, fanned the flame of Matthew's admiration into a full-blown blaze.

"Come in," she said, "I have not seen you for several days. I want you to meet my husband—Mrs. Blasher." The woman gave him the hostile look of the poor who frankly hate the rich, and do not attempt to placate

them with servility. He bowed to her as punctiliously as if she had been a duchess.

Turning away from him, she faced Doris.

"My little boy is ill," she said.

"I was afraid he was ill," responded Doris, "because I had not seen him for several days. It was unpardonable of me not to call when I knew he was not well. It is nothing serious, I hope."

"I do not know." She flashed an inimical look at Matthew.

"Haven't you sent for a physician?"

"Oh, yes, I had a physician. The child is in feeble health, that's all."

"Does he need anything that—anything in particular? Beef tea, soup, port——?"

The woman laughed harshly.

"I do not suppose any of those things would hurt him," she said, and Matthew felt his compassion turn to dislike and mistrust. There was no reason for being brusque to the point of incivility to Doris, who, he felt sure, had offered to help this woman or had helped her before now.

"It's not something—anything—the matter with his lungs?" Doris inquired.

"Tuberculosis? Why not say it right out. I won't know until to-morrow. They're examining his sputum."

"Look here," said Doris, "you must take him away from here. I do not care what the mysterious business is which you say keeps you here in New York. You must get that child away into clean, pure country air at once."

"I cannot take him away." Mrs. Blasher spoke in the accents of outraged mother-love that sees its offspring singled out by malignant fate for premature destruction.

"Why not? I have given you several addresses of in-

expensive boarding houses up in Liberty where it will not cost you more to live than here in New York."

Mrs. Blasher's puny face worked convulsively.

"I can get credit here in the city," she said, emitting the words spasmodically, as if every syllable were painful, "but not in Liberty. I haven't received my monthly allowance for two months."

Doris rose.

"Let us go to my room," she said gently, "so we can hunt up some of those Liberty addresses." And, as she had previously spoken of the Liberty addresses as being in Mrs. Blasher's possession, there was only one construction Matthew could place upon Doris's invitation to Mrs. Blasher to come with her to her room.

"Dear Lord in heaven," Matthew murmured, "what a woman!" and, turning on the light, he immersed himself in the last copy of a law journal.

When Doris came back into the room he spoke to her abruptly, looking at her across the edge of his paper.

"You helped her, of course!"

"Of course."

"Doris, I do not like that woman."

Doris hesitated.

"I pity her intensely," she said, "and it is only fair to her to say that, until to-day, although she is desperately poor, she did not allow me to help her."

"How did you meet her? Where?"

"On the street. I was attracted by her little boy." For no reason that Matthew could divine, Doris blushed. "He is a beautiful little boy," she added in a low, subdued voice, "and that is how we became acquainted."

"Has she been here before?"

"Yes, frequently. They live in a wretched neighborhood—it seems too queer to me, Matthew, that within five minutes' walk from this beautiful locality there

should be squalor and wretchedness—and I do not think they always have enough to eat. And, as she would not let me give her money, sometimes, at lunch——" she broke off.

"I understand," said Matthew. "Help her, Doris, all you wish, but do not trust her. Give her money, because of the little lad who is ill, but steer clear of her. Although she is a widow and poor her poverty, my dear, is no guarantee of her respectability."

To his surprise Doris dimpled and blushed. She dropped her head to one side and assumed an inscrutable, alluring look; all her lofty virtue had vanished; all the subtle deviltry and charm and clinging warmth which seemed an irrepressible part of herself lately were in full swing again.

"Mrs. Blasher is not a widow. That is, she never told me anything at all about her husband. But I am sure she is not a widow."

"How do you know?"

"Well, for one thing, she hasn't one little bit of that perfectly intelligent interest in the other sex which all unattached persons feel."

"May I ask—do you consider yourself unattached?"

"Alas, I am your property; therefore attached."

"Why 'alas'?"

"Because, being attached, I am prohibited from feeling an intelligent interest in about one-half of my fellow beings."

He was mortified, he could not have said why. He had hoped that her raillery would remain in abeyance until he had spoken to her of his love; he felt tired and nervous and he was in no mood to answer nonsense with nonsense or witticism with repartee. He took up his paper and resumed reading.

"Matth-you!"

"Well?"

"Is your paper very entertaining?"

"Very."

"Not for me."

"If you will tell me what publication you find entertaining I will send the hall-boy out for a copy."

She looked a little abashed by his coolness, but her good spirits were not to be quenched. "When you married me, Matth-you," she said, "you promised to love, cherish and protect me. You love me, at least you say you do, and I am perforce compelled to let it go at that; protect me you do, although you forced me to beg you almost on my knees to be permitted to retain your name; but as to cherishing—I'll make a solemn affidavit, dear, that you contribute absolutely nothing toward the last clause of the marriage contract."

Matthew laid down his paper with a sigh.

"Do you labor under the erroneous belief that 'to entertain' and 'to cherish' are synonymous?"

"I labor under the correct belief that 'to entertain' is included in 'to cherish.'"

His eyes upon his paper, he said: "I would suggest to you that, like a good little girl, you go to your room and look up the meaning of both words in the dictionary."

Doris rose.

"I obey," she said, in that tone of mock meekness which always sent the blood surging through his veins. "I leave the room, since you send me away. But in my room I have a far more delicate task in hand than looking up musty, dusty old words in a silly, fat dictionary."

"What task, Doris?"

"Combing my eyebrows," was her startling reply.

"Combing your—I never heard of such a thing."

"I comb them daily so that, if my husband ever elects

to write sonnets to them, they may be worthy of the honor."

She stood at the door, her whole lovely person radiating subtle deviltry. She looked at him with soft, liquid eyes. The golden motes in the brown of the iris sparkled and flickered. He rose to his feet, as if impelled to do so by a magnet.

"If you wish to see me comb my eyebrows," she said, "you may come to my room."

He stood like a man in a trance. She was gone, but she had asked him to come to her room. He was trembling violently with the medley of emotions which were surging through his brain.

Doris had asked him to come to her room!

Fully ten minutes elapsed before he walked through the sitting-room and out into the hall. The door to Doris's room was open but the room was obscured by the pink shell curtains through which he had never peered. Discretion and delicacy had forbidden him to enter her little sanctum, even in her absence.

"Doris," he asked softly, "may I come in?"

"You may," she said.

Pushing aside the gently tinkling strings of shells, hesitation in his step, he entered. He looked about him in wonder. As he had neither mother nor sister he had never been in a woman's bedroom and this one seemed to him the most marvelous apartment he had ever entered.

Doris's room was furnished entirely in pink and white and gold. It was a large room and served as a boudoir as well as a sleeping room. The snowy curtains of priceless lace at the window were festooned in place by large faintly pink satin bows; the wallpaper was embossed and looked like damask; its design was executed in two shades of pink. The small rugs on the floor in front of bed and hearth were of white bearskin and lay upon a pale

green carpet with rose garlands trailing through it. On the dressing table lay a bewildering array of small gold-mounted implements—nail file, mirror, hairbrush—and in front of the dressing table, in a pink and white kimono, sat Doris, combing her eyebrows with a small, fine comb. She smiled faintly as Matthew came in and sat down in a corner of the gilt and pink divan.

"And do you really do that every day?"

"Every day! I do it three and four times a day!"

"Um," said he.

"How often do you comb your moustache?" she inquired politely.

"I do not know that I ever combed it," he said.

Comb suspended in mid-air she surveyed herself in the mirror of the dressing table, her head inclined now to one side, now to the other. Rising, she laid down the comb, and walking to the divan sat down beside Matthew.

"Well, sir husband," she said, "do you think you can write that sonnet upon my eyebrows now?"

"Doris!" The swift current of his love was rushing over him. "Doris!" he clasped her in his arms and held her close. "Doris, my wife, my life, my sweetheart." He laid fierce, wild, burning kisses upon the soft, smooth, cool cheek, upon the warm red lips, upon the white, round throat, and upon the delicious, delicate swelling curves of the closed eyes.

"My wife, my wife," he whispered.

Even then, lying limp and relaxed in his arms, her mischievousness did not desert her.

"Oh, Matthew," she whispered, "this is merciless love-making at last."

"You witch! You dear, sweet, cruel witch," and he fell to kissing her again. He felt her place one soft arm about his neck and a delicate fragrance seemed to sweep over him, to brush over his face, to caress his nostrils,

a fragrance that crept forth from the soft, golden hair and from her bosom and the sweet warm circle of her arm.

"Doris, Doris," he murmured.

He was aware only of the beating of the blood in his veins, of the pounding of his heart, of the softness and pliancy of her supple body lying so warmly and yieldingly in his arms.

And then—then—there fell upon his ears again the voice that had once before spoiled a love scene for him that day. Marie, standing discreetly behind the curtain of shells which screened the room from her gaze, interrupted them.

"Beg pardon, madame, Mrs. Blasher is here again."

They fell apart, dismay in their faces. Said Doris, sweeping a stray wisp of hair into place with her one hand: "I cannot see her now, Marie."

Marie, the perfect maid, still delayed her departure.

"She begged very hard, madame, not to be turned away."

Doris frowned. That the capable servant should have seen her preoccupation, possibly had guessed its nature, annoyed her intensely, as Matthew could see. It destroyed the glamour of this, their first real love tryst.

"Very well, show her in."

Mortified for his wife, vexed for himself, furious with Marie, and harboring positively murderous emotions for Mrs. Blasher, Matthew rose from the divan.

Marie held the curtain aside for Mrs. Blasher to enter just as Matthew was about to make his exit. He stepped back, waited for her to cross the threshold before leaving the room himself. The forlorn, drab little creature, so weazened and vitiated, crept into Doris's golden and white and pink bower like a baleful shadow. Matthew shivered. Distinctly he did not like this woman

and he felt that fate had dealt hardly with him in allowing her to cross his path twice in one day at equally crucial moments.

As he passed out of the room, he heard Mrs. Blasher's voice. Like her manner, it was choppy and nervous.

"Mrs. Ferguson, I have come to tell you something terrible."

"Your boy—not——?" cried Doris, all compassion and tenderness once more.

"No; not my boy. My husband——"

"Ah!"

So Doris had been right. The woman did have a husband! Matthew stood at the door a moment smiling grimly in recollection of Doris's comment on that score.

"It is horribly sordid!" he heard Mrs. Blasher exclaim, "I am beside myself, and yet, thank heaven, it is not too late. Oh, Mrs. Ferguson, I am entirely unworthy of your kindness. . . ."

Matthew heard no more. He walked down the hall to the sitting-room and took up his law journal again with a resolute determination to employ his time profitably. But he did not read. He thought of Doris, of Mrs. Blasher, and of himself. He almost hated Mrs. Blasher at the moment. He felt certain she had destroyed the atmosphere for that day at least.

Five minutes passed, ten minutes, a half hour, and Matthew was not conscious of active thought. Then, finally he heard Doris and Mrs. Blasher coming down the hall, and, as they passed the room in which he was sitting on their way to the door to the outer hall, he heard a few disjointed words spoken in Doris's voice—"rest assured—you are forgiven—you did not know—tempted beyond your strength——"

Intolerable! Without a doubt she had soiled Doris's

ears with some sordid story of misplaced affection, betrayal—heaven knows what.

He heard the outer door close. He thought that Doris would return and tell him what Mrs. Blasher had wanted to see her about; but a half hour passed before Doris reappeared in evening dress.

"Will you take me to the theater to-night, Matthew," she asked, "to recompense me for the matinée which I lost this afternoon? I need a little relaxation, I think."

Relaxation from what? Mrs. Blasher's story, no doubt. Delicacy forbade Matthew to offer any comment.

And, as he stood at the telephone asking what seats he could get that evening at the Empire, he uttered wordless imprecations in which were involved Marie, Mrs. Blasher, himself and fate—everybody, in fact, except his Doris.

## CHAPTER XXI

*Another Mysterious Visitor Causes a Distressing Disturbance*

Matthew received a summons from Mr. Cravatt early the next morning, which was a Sunday, and for five days he was kept with his nose close to the grindstone of legal affairs which pertained to the well-being of the Powers. He remained at his office until after midnight those days, and left the house before Doris was out of her room.

On the fifth day of this grind, at three o'clock in the afternoon, he put the finishing touch to his work.

"Tommy," he said, "I think I have earned a half holiday."

"If you take it to-day, sir," said Tommy, with the facetiousness of the confidential clerk, "you'll only get a third of a holiday."

"Well, Tommy, if half a loaf is better than none, I guess a third is, too," Matthew replied cheerfully, and departed.

"Home," he flung at his chauffeur, and regretted that he had not telephoned Doris asking her to await his return. A drive in the park on a day like this, with her at his side, would be delectable.

He was as impatient as a small boy who is going to a circus. Regardless of speed laws, he urged his chauffeur

on to greater speed; the elevator, also, seemed intolerably slow; finally, after an unconscionable delay, caused by stupid help, he entered his own apartment, and drew back with astonishment. From the drawing-room proceeded the tones of a masculine voice.

On second thought there was no reason why Doris should not receive a caller in his absence if she chose to do so. But she had never yet done so, and the circumstance that he had not heard this voice before added to his annoyance.

He stopped a moment at the threshold before entering. He could not distinguish what the man's voice was saying, but he told himself that never, in all his life, had he heard a human voice of such limpid sweetness. Its cadences rose and fell with the softness of rose petals; it was low-pitched, and its quality was pure as a bell, and now that he had listened to it for several moments the voice seemed to waken some recollection in him—to bring back a thing out of the past——

"Where have I heard that voice before?" he asked himself. He could not answer the question, and he strained his ears more intently. No, he had never met the owner of that voice face to face. And yet—somewhere, sometime, long, long ago, he had heard consonances forced into liquid beauty and sibilants made caressive and charming by the magic of a voice like that. But where and when?

Curiosity succeeded annoyance, and, overcoat on arm, he strode into the room with the air of a conqueror.

Doris rose and came forward. He took the hand she gave him, and noted that it was cold as ice. He looked into her face and saw there the signs of some tumultuous upheaval over which she had gained mastery. Whatever tale her eyes might have told him was not revealed, for she held them closely veiled by her drooping lids.

"The gentleman has come to see me about some charitable organization," she said, speaking with evident effort. Her voice sounded distant and constrained.

"My name is Echevverria," said the stranger. "Alfons Echevverria." His English would have been perfect but for the indescribable softness in which he swathed all sounds. "I have lately arrived from Barcelona."

"Indeed!" said Matthew, although, on the whole, there was nothing very remarkable in all this. The persons whom Doris had met abroad were legion, and a resident of Barcelona might very well have been among them.

Matthew was startled out of his usual composure by the extreme beauty of person of the Señor Echevverria, who was neither slight nor tall of stature, presenting, indeed, that medium height which inevitably impresses the most casual beholder as being perfect. His head was as exquisite a presentment of fine modeling as any head carved by Phidias, and his hands, which he had a trick of carrying in a way that brought them under observation without making them conspicuous, were perfect of their kind. He wore his clothes so well that they seemed part of the man, and his brown complexion, black eyes, and the singular warmth of color in cheeks and on lips proclaimed him a Latin and explained the extraordinarily melodious voice and exotic name.

The stranger was perfectly at ease.

"It was very kind of Mrs. Ferguson to receive me. Exceedingly kind. And it was very kind of Mrs. van Duyskuk to send me to her."

There was a graciousness in the acknowledgment of the kindness that exalted it.

"Won't you be seated?" asked Matthew politely.

"I thank you." The "I" made the sentence personal, gave it warmth and a certain noble simplicity. Matthew noticed that the repose of the young Latin as he seated

himself was very different from the repose of the Anglo-Saxon. He neither lounged nor sat stiffly. The chair upon which he sat, by virtue of his sitting there, became, like the clothes he wore, a thing intimate and personal.

"Have you been here long?"

"I arrived about a week ago."

"Your English is perfect. You must have been here, or in England, before?"

"Ah!" The young man bowed his acknowledgments of the compliment, receiving it with the ingenuous delight of a child that has been praised.

"I am a cosmopolitan, Señor. My name tells you that my father was a Spaniard. But my mother was an Italian and part of my youth was spent with her in the Italian colony at Florence, so that my ability to use your beautiful tongue is due to that."

"I see," said Matthew. He looked at Doris, whose face was a complete blank. He marveled how any woman could contrive to wipe away so completely every vestige of expression from her face, and he wondered why she had done it. A sudden suspicion flared up in him. There was no reason why Doris, the accomplished woman of the world, should be unresponsive to the point of discourtesy unless, indeed, she had met this man before—and had taken more than a passing fancy to him.

The devil that lives in some forgotten nook in the hearts of all men was stirred into activity. Matthew meant to surprise any secret his wife was keeping from him.

"Do you intend remaining with us long?" he asked.

"Only a few months, Señor. I do not believe I shall be happy in a country that is not Latin."

"Why not?"

"Ah, Señor, it is hard to explain without giving offense. And I wish to give offense to no one."

"Well," said Matthew, "I promise you that we will not take offense if you speak plainly. Will we, Doris?"

"There is no reason why we should," Doris said, still with downcast eyes.

"Life, people, the customs, Señor—all is so different here. All is so businesslike, even courtship and wooing. In the restaurants at night, after the opera and theater, when you would expect the glamour of romance and of love to hover about, there is nothing at all in evidence but the material enjoyment of good things to eat and drink. But the spiritual joy that should lie back of it—when men and women sup together on dainty viands and taste amber-colored or ruby-hued-wine—all that, Señor, is woefully absent from the Anglo-Saxon schedule of life."

There was no resisting the man's fascination. Matthew felt himself slipping under his spell. Like all men of strong personality, he delighted in finding the same quality of individuality in others, particularly if dissimilar in quality to his own. He glanced sharply at Doris and saw that she was struggling with some emotion, he could not tell what.

"It is all the harder to understand," the young Latin continued, "because your women, Señor, are so beautiful." Matthew had the sensation that he was being accused of possessing a harem. "I have been all over the world, but nowhere else, Señor, not in much-vaunted France, nor in my own Spain, nor in fair Italy, nor in Hungary, with its piquant types, is there such amazing beauty as among American women; and, whereas, in other countries all beautiful women seem cast in the same —national—mold, there is no limitation to the surprising variety of your women. But they lack something, Señor. They lack, as a rule, that pliancy and softness which are the crowning beauty of womanly charm. There are exceptions."

He flashed a quick glance at Doris as he concluded and Matthew felt himself flush indignantly. Was the fellow trying to make love to Doris under his very nose?

"Then, too," Señor Echevverria continued his monologue, cupping his chin in his right hand, "above everything else, your life lacks color. As a nation you think of business only. What man among you reads poetry? Yet the most divinely inspired poets vouchsafed to modern nations made for you poetry so beautiful that it is worthy to be inscribed in letters of gold on pillars of marble and tablets of ivory. And yet, I repeat, what man, unless he is a book reviewer, reads any of the modern poets—Stephen Philips, or Alfred Noyes—or remembers a line from Keats, Browning, Swinburne, or even from Tennyson? Who takes time to go afield and listen to the voices of the thrush or of the brook? Which one of you knows anything of that panting, haunting sense of beauty, Señor, that inspired Shelley when he wrote:

> "'Tell me, sprite or bird,
> What sweet thoughts are thine,
> I have never heard,
> Praise of love or wine,
> That panted forth a flood of sweetness so divine.'"

Doris rose abruptly. Her face was white as death.

"I must ask you to excuse me," she said. "I am not—well. Think over the conditions of my gift and write me when I may expect you to call for it."

Without another word she walked from the room.

Señor Echevverria apologized profusely. He hoped his fondness for poetry had not annoyed the Señora. He would take occasion to tender her his regrets in person either at the ball of the Cravatts, which, of course, would be attended by the Señor and the Señora, or at her own home. And, amid a stately silence such as Matthew

could summon at times, the young man bowed himself from the room.

Matthew went hastily to Doris's door. It was closed. He tried it and found it locked.

"Doris," he cried.

She made no response, but presently he heard a sob and then another.

"Doris," he cried more imperatively, "open your door."

She must have heard him but she did not reply. At intervals came the sound of a heartbroken sob, those cruel, deep-rooted, dry sobs that shake the very citadel of life and seem to convulse nature itself.

Then the devil that had been wrestling with him for supremacy all afternoon rose up in all his Satanic majesty. Matthew remembered that, when they had taken the apartment, a full set of extra keys had been given him. He had locked the extra set into a tin box in which he kept whatever papers he brought home to look over at night.

Treading softly, he went to his own room, found the bunch of keys, and fitted them one by one into the other doors of the apartment, and, having thus, by elision, determined which was the key to Doris's door, he thrust it into the keyhole with the utmost caution. He had some difficulty in unlocking the door because the key on the other side of the door was in the keyhole, but, after trying repeatedly, he succeeded in getting the door open. So softly had he conducted his maneuvers that he had actually entered Doris's room and relocked the door behind him before she became aware of his presence.

She was lying upon her back stretched full length upon the divan. One arm was flung over her head and the sounds she uttered, now that he was in the room, sounded to him more like the moaning of a wounded animal than the sobs of a human being.

"Doris!"

She started and glanced up. A look of deadly fright came into her face.

"Matthew," she said, "I want to be alone, please."

"And I want to know why you are crying."

"I can't tell you."

He sat down on the edge of the divan close beside her and leaned low over her face.

"Why are you crying?" he asked roughly.

She did not reply. She shivered and shrank away from him.

"Doris," he cried passionately, "I love you as it is given to few women to be loved, but at this moment I despise you because you have lied to me!"

"Lied, Matthew? No, not lied."

She tried to raise herself to a sitting posture but he forced her to lie still and listen to him.

"I want to know what this man is to you?" he demanded, his voice harsh with anger and passion.

"Nothing—nothing at all—how can you think——"

"I do not think. I used my eyes. And I want to know what there is, or was, between you."

"You are insulting me," she panted.

"I told you that if you wanted your freedom you might have it. Why, then, if you wanted it, did you not tell me, instead of——"

She closed his mouth with her hand.

"Hush," she said. "You do not know what you are saying. I never desired my freedom, Matthew, not for one little moment, since you gave me your name."

"Very likely!" His laugh sounded odious in his own ears. Even in his anger he wondered that he could produce such a disagreeable sound. "Very likely, Doris. Why, you have played with me, and tormented me, and teased me, and laughed at me, and—God forgive you—

why did you not tell me you wanted to be free so that you could marry your——"

She lifted her hand and struck at his mouth, but, as her hand descended, she unconsciously softened the impetus, and when her hand fell upon his lips it came as a sudden pressure rather than as a blow. He kissed it passionately and at that she pulled it away.

"I love you, Doris," he cried. "Only a week ago I offered to release you. But I do not repeat that offer now. Whatever you have done, whatever you are guilty of, I love you—I love you—and I will not set you free."

Her entire body recoiled from the arch of his arm above her.

"Hush, Matthew, hush," she whispered. "You are not yourself. Indeed, you are not yourself. Be yourself—be controlled and composed."

"So you can laugh some more at the self-controlled fool? No, my girl, you have scorned me, flaunted me, laughed at me, and put me off long enough."

Her face turned gray. She lay very still, looking at him with eyes in which there was mirrored horror indescribable. He caught both of her wrists in his strong grasp and held her thus so that she was utterly helpless.

"Whatever this man is to you I am your husband. Do you understand?"

"This is horrible, horrible," she gasped.

He released her wrists and encircled her throat with his fingers. He felt her pulse throb heavily with her agitation and fright, but she made no effort to resist him.

"How easy it would be to kill you," he said, "as you deserve to be killed, for your perfidy."

"I would rather have you kill me, Matthew," she said, "than insult me so cruelly."

He caught her up in his arms and clasped her to his heart and began to rain kisses upon her face. His em-

brace was an assault, so roughly did he hold her. She began to twist herself in his arms, struggling hither and thither, like a wild thing that has been snared. Her bosom heaved tumultuously against his arm. She contrived to get her right hand free and she beat frantically, but without strength, against his breast.

"Matthew, Matthew," she implored, "have you gone mad?"

"Mad for you, my girl; mad for you."

"I cannot bear seeing you like this, Matthew. If you love me——"

"If I love you," he snarled, and fell to kissing her again. She resisted him for a while, and then suddenly he felt her body grow limp and relaxed in his arms.

He laid her down among the cushions. Only then did he perceive the terrible pallor that spread over her face. He could not perceive that she breathed. Her bosom, which had fluttered so wildly but a moment ago, no longer heaved. He became terribly frightened.

"Doris!"

She did not answer. She lay perfectly still; not a muscle quivered, not an eyelash moved.

"Doris!" he cried in a horrified voice, and knelt down beside her. She opened her eyes and looked at him dazedly.

"I love you, Doris," he cried. "I love you. Do you not see what a nightmare I am living through? In heaven's name, tell me all there is to tell, but let it be the truth. What is this man Echevverria to you?"

"Nothing."

"What was he to you?"

"Nothing, less than nothing. I swear it."

"Will you swear that you never saw him before today?"

"No," she said, "I cannot swear that, because it would

not be true. I knew him—years ago—under painful circumstances connected with my first marriage. I did not see him for years—not until to-day—and I swear that this is Gospel truth."

"You did not love him—years ago, when you knew him?"

"Dear Lord in heaven, no. I hated and despised him."

"Yet he is very attractive, Doris."

"Do you think so?" she gasped.

"Why, then, this perturbation?"

She shuddered but did not reply.

Again he caught her to his breast. Again she fought him off.

"Why do you resist me?" he cried. "If this man is nothing to you, as you swear——"

"Oh, Matthew," she said, "you, who have been kind so long, will you not be kind a while longer, and forbear forcing me to endure your kisses at a moment when I do not desire them?"

"No," he said, "I will not."

Shame came into her eyes and pain was written in the puckered brow.

"Only hear me," she implored. "You have been so patient——"

"I will be patient no longer——"

"You have been so gentle——"

"I have forgotten the feel of gentleness," said he.

"For your sake, Matthew, if not for mine——"

"Words," he cried, "words! they have availed you long enough. They avail you nothing from this hour."

She fell back among the cushions of the divan and with gentle strength held him off.

"You sent me to Europe," she began.

"I was a fool to do it," he cried hotly.

"No, Matthew, you were—a gentleman. You asked me a minute ago why I was so perturbed and what perturbed me. In the Pavilion at Diberto Manor there stands a praying stool and upon the praying stool lies a volume of poetry, and it is open——"

He sprang up and stood before her erect and calm.

"I remember it all, now," he said.

Doris raised herself into a sitting position.

"When this young man recited those lines, oh, Matthew, it brought back a tender little jest, a foolish little jest, too tiny and foolish and tender to repeat. Do you not understand now, my husband?"

She began to cry softly, and he, looking down, felt passion and jealousy crowded out by the divine compassion which he felt for her. He was overcome, too, with remorse and humiliation. His face grew hot as he recalled the words he had flung at her.

Thoroughly sobered at last he unlocked the door and opened it, and then, stooping, picked up the extra key and laid it on her dressing table. In shamed silence he left the room.

## CHAPTER XXII

*Señor Echevverria Receives an Enormous Donation*

Señor Alfons Echevverria, in spite of Doris's asseverations, was destined to become an emotional obsession with Matthew. He felt that Doris should have told him what were the "painful circumstances" to which she had alluded in regard to her former knowledge of Echevverria, but, in view of his own unjustifiable behavior to her, delicacy forbade that he reopen the subject, lest, in doing so, Doris should believe him still suspicious.

The Señor was very much in evidence everywhere. With Mrs. van Duyskuk as his social sponsor social success was assured him, and his own exotic, somewhat flamboyant, personality made him the idol of the hour. It was impossible to escape him at the opera, dinner, or ball.

Doris's manner continued frigidly disdainful whenever she came into contact with him. Once or twice, when Echevverria appeared on the scene unexpectedly, Matthew saw her change color. Twice or thrice when Echevverria, in one of his poetic outbursts, which were not infrequent, recited poetry in an impassioned voice, while his beautifully modeled hand lay under his chin in an attitude which no sculptor, ancient or modern, could have bettered, he saw her chafe as under extreme annoyance. He had heard her object to Stuart's habit of twid-

dling his thumbs, and he had been able to sympathize with that objection, but he wondered that this innocuous habit of Echevverria's should cause the intense annoyance she exhibited, since it was unthinkable that the poetry he recited should invariably be poetry connected in her mind with Lawrence Diberto.

Matthew did not know what to believe. To mistrust her in cold blood was impossible. Cruel suspicions darted into his head, but were expeditiously expelled.

He had noticed that Doris avoided meeting Echevverria whenever possible. The Latin appeared not to notice her dislike and remained uniformly attentive and charming.

One evening at a cotillon at the Beechams, Matthew, in filling Doris's dance card, approached Echevverria. The young man's face lighted up with that boyish look of seraphic joy to which it was difficult to ascribe any but a spiritual origin.

"I shall be delighted, Señor, but I fear it will not please the Señora."

"Why not, Mr. Echevverria?" Matthew inquired innocently, and put down the young man's name for two dances. He watched Doris closely as he handed her the filled card. Her brow contracted with displeasure on discovering Echevverria's name.

"Did he have the audacity to ask for these dances?" she inquired.

"Really," said Matthew indifferently, "I do not remember whether he asked for them or whether I offered them to him."

Doris's face flamed scarlet.

"The hound," she muttered under her breath. Taking her pencil she deliberately crossed off the name for both dances.

"Will you tell him, Matthew, or shall I?"

Matthew expostulated. He urged that it was hardly

possible for her to refuse to dance with the young man unless she intended not to dance at all.

"I am fond of dancing and I shall dance every other dance, and those two dances as well, if I find a partner for them," she said with a toss of her head.

"You will give him serious offense," said Matthew, watching her narrowly.

"And do you think I care whether I offend him or not?" she demanded. "Ah, Señor Echevverria," she pronounced the name scornfully, derisively, as the subject of their controversy appeared unexpectedly, "there you are. I do not care to dance the two dances for which you are scheduled as my partner, therefore I have crossed off your name. Matthew, I wish to speak to Miss Cravatt, will you take me across to her?"

Thus, as a result of his experiment, poor Matthew was placed in the predicament of having to be discourteous to his wife, or of offering an offense to a stranger. Being a chivalrous gentleman he took his wife across the floor first and then sought out the Señor to make his apologies.

The Señor was delightful. He laid the palm of his beautiful brown hand against Matthew's coat-sleeve—it was a trick he had that seemed to be the equivalent of an Anglo-Saxon slap upon the shoulder.

"I beg of you to give no thought to the matter," he said in his softest tones. "Beautiful women are often capricious. It does not make them less adorable."

Matthew did not resent this speech. He had no objection under the sun—what man has?—to having other men envy him his beautiful wife, although that beautiful wife was as yet very imperfectly his, especially as he now felt positive that Doris's dislike for the young Spaniard was not assumed.

Assured on these two vital points, he began to experi-

ence a fondness for Echevverria, who formed a habit just about this time of dropping in every few days at Matthew's office for a friendly chat. Alfons Echevverria was so witty, pleasant, and entertaining that Matthew, from disliking him, fell into a very decided liking for the young Latin. He fully comprehended the spell he had thrown upon half the young women of their set, and he marveled that Doris should detest him so utterly.

Then he remembered her detestation of Colonel Chalmers, who, in a way, had as agreeable a personality as this young man. He had thought that dislike instinctive, had believed it was due to some subconscious agency which had warned her against the evil in her uncle's nature. Probably, he reflected, young Echevverria was a thorough-going scamp of some sort; but, as his knavery, whatever it might be, apparently did not impinge upon his or upon Doris's life, Matthew was inclined to view the obscure rascality with leniency, especially as he thoroughly enjoyed the young fellow's society.

Tommy was present at some of Echevverria's flashes of fascination and Matthew said to him casually one day at the beginning of this hot-house intimacy with the young Latin: "Charming fellow, don't you think, Tommy?"

"Seems so," said Tommy, "but I have a curious feeling, Chief, of having seen either him or his picture before—some time during my brief career as the Baron de Montmorenci. He looks to me more like an Italian than a Spaniard."

"His mother was an Italian."

"Um," said Tommy.

"Say what you like about him, Tommy," said Matthew, "I like him, but I know nothing about him."

"Well, Chief," said Tommy, "it seems to me he figured

in a disgraceful scandal of some sort either five or six years ago."

"Woman?" Matthew asked with terrible swiftness.

"I don't think so. The chap has a face no one is likely to forget—he's such a devilish good-looker—and the scandal he was mixed up in was particularly unsavory."

"Then there must have been a woman connected with it," said Matthew emphatically.

"It is possible, but I do not think so, yet I cannot seem to remember just what the story was. Devilish sordid, it was—devilish sordid, that's all I am able to remember. At any rate, Chief, if I have a chance, suppose I run over to the *Bulletin* some evening and go over the old files."

Matthew had the unpleasant sensation of having allowed another person a glimpse of the gross suspicions which all his loyalty and love for Doris had not succeeded in entirely uprooting.

"It would be interesting to know, Tommy," he said with assumed indifference, "but do not bother about it on my account. I do not expect to have business dealings with him, therefore his past matters nothing to me."

In January Matthew was dispatched West by the Powers, and he was away for over a month. Doris, he thought, seemed to experience relief of some sort when he told her that he must leave New York for a while. Since that momentous evening when he had found her entertaining Echevverria on his return from the office he had made no effort to produce any change in their mode of life; he had immersed himself in business and seen as little of Doris as was commensurate with common civility. Because his love for her never flagged he believed that, in justice to himself, it was wiser not to aggravate by constant propinquity the heart-hunger entailed upon him by the unusual relationship between them.

He returned in February. The day was one of those

smiling, balmy, sunny days when the air is perfumed with a scent as of mingled snow and leafage, and the sparrows chirp in their nests under cornice and window-sill in the mistaken notion that spring actually has come. The deep, pulsing, throbbing undercurrent of spring that quickens the blood and makes eager the heart was perceptible also, and, as he alighted from his train, a yearning and a craving for her rushed over him like a spring tide.

So poignant was the feeling that he hesitated a moment before giving his destination to the chauffeur of the taxicab he had hailed. Business called him down town to lay matters before Cravatt and Beecham as soon as possible; love urged him to fly home to take Doris unawares and to rely upon it that the intensity of his emotion would at last pull down the barrier between them.

Duty triumphed. He reported to both Beecham and Cravatt, and arranged for a longer interview on the morrow. Then, as a matter of form, he drove to his own office to ask for his mail.

Tommy was not in the office when he entered, and, after shaking hands with the entire office force, the constituent members of which all grinned sheepishly at their democratic principal's cordiality, he swung easily into his own private office, and, jerking open his roll-top desk, flung himself into his chair, and, with greedy fingers began sorting out the letters which seemed of paramount interest. The stack which Tommy had left face down on the desk as a sign that, although opened, they had not been attended to, was formidable.

Tommy came in while Matthew was thus engaged, and Matthew, with the surliness of preoccupation, grunted out a "Hello, Tommy," and went on with his letters.

"I never was more glad to see anyone than I am to see you, Chief," said Tommy.

"Thank you," said Matthew without looking up.

"Something happened, Chief, of which I hate to speak."

"Out with it then and get it over with," Matthew advised, eyes still on the letters.

"It's—it's——"

"Well——?"

"Chief, it's this. You know that Mrs. Ferguson asked me some time ago to look after her check book for her, have it balanced, you know—that sort of thing——"

"Yep," said Matthew, with the inelegant forcefulness of the man who desires above everything to be left alone for a few minutes.

"Well, sir," Tommy rarely said "sir" now-a-days and only when greatly disturbed, "she—she—I hardly know how to tell you, sir——"

"Well, if you don't, how am I to know, Tommy?" Matthew inquired ironically.

"She has made out a terrifically big check and it's been cashed this day—by—by—Mr. Echevverria."

"Oh, that's all right," said Matthew, easily. "Don't worry about my wife's finances. She has more money than you and I and Judge Witherspoon and old Furlow put together, my lad."

"I know, Mr. Ferguson, but this sum was really very, very big."

Matthew sighed wearily.

"I'm sure it was," he said. "I know it was. Echevverria has wanted her for some time to subscribe for some charity in Seville, or Barcelona. Surprised she did it, though, because she—however, that's her affair."

Tommy said once more, uncertainly: "The amount was very big, sir."

Matthew shuffled his feet with nervousness.

"Look here, Tommy," he said, "my wife's income is from half to three-fourths of a million a year. She has

virtually promised that she will not exceed that amount in her disbursements. In fact, she cannot exceed that amount without my knowledge, as I am her business agent. What she does with her income is no concern of mine any more that it's my concern how you spend your income. Understand?"

Poor loyal Tommy was at last bullied into silence. Matthew, his interest aroused by that lapse into silence, looked up and made one of those sudden verbal pounces which were the dread of his adversaries.

"Did you look up Echevverria's record in those old *Bulletin* files?" he demanded.

Tommy's lip trembled. He turned his back on his beloved Chief, and, while stalking out of the room, flung back at Matthew a disgruntled "No, sir."

Matthew threw down the letter he had in his hand and arose from his chair. On his face was a look of utter bewilderment, for he had seen that in Tommy's face which amazed him incredibly.

"Why," he said, speaking to himself, "why under the sun should Tommy have lied to me?"

He stood irresolutely, half inclined to summon his factotum and demand an explanation. Then he laughed and reseated himself.

"Oh, well," he said optimistically, "I guess he wouldn't satisfy my curiosity because I hurt his feelings by being cross with him the moment I got back. Good old Tommy!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### *Mr. Ferguson at Last Enters into the Enchanted Kingdom*

A half-hour later he let himself into his apartment with his latch-key. The heavy carpets allowed no sound of footsteps to penetrate to the sitting-room and he entered it unperceived by Doris, who stood at the window looking out into the street. There were strength, loftiness, and a wonderful beauty and dignity in her face in repose, but when speaking it assumed an expression more gracious and soft.

"Doris!"

She started and turned. A great wave of color engulfed her face and throat, and then, with a happy cry, she sprang forward.

"Matthew," she cried, "Oh, Matthew!" There was no mistaking her happiness at seeing him. She gave him both hands.

"Is that all?" he inquired.

Impulsively she threw both arms about his neck and kissed him upon the lips.

"Doris, I have missed you very much."

"I do not believe a word of it," she replied laughing. "I believe you never thought of me at all from the minute you left until this moment."

"Do you judge me by yourself?"

"Ah," she cried, "you have grown witty."

"Was I so dull before," he protested.

"You were so good, so very good, Matth-you." It had been some time since he had last heard the dear hiatus between the syllables of his name.

"I warn you, Doris——"

"I will say you were good." She was quite grave, as he saw with surprise, and his amazement grew when she led him to a divan, and then, after they were seated, placed one hand upon his. "I must say it, Matthew. I think sometimes I have appeared ungrateful to you, but, believe me, dearest husband, I appreciate all your ever-loving kindness has done for me in these two difficult years of our marriage."

"Once," he said, "I was unkind and discourteous and—and very brutal, Doris. Do you forgive me for that, dear?"

"Shall I tell you something, Matthew? I love you for the very unkindness and discourtesy and—and brutality you showed me one single time. Shall I tell you why? Ah, dearest, it sounds horrid, but we poor women, with our frail, tender bodies, so dearly prize strength in our men that even a little brutal speech on the part of the man we love—since that is sometimes an excrescence of strength—is not wholly distasteful, if it is caused by his love."

"Doris, you are exonerating me divinely."

"I am telling you the truth. There were times in the past, ungrateful wretch that I was, when your self-control and unshakable poise angered me. But that day—when you were so shockingly cruel to me—stamped you as quite human; because, you know, a man who had no shortcomings and no faults at all would not be human."

"Shortcomings and faults," he laughed. "I have enough of them."

"Have you?" she said. "I have not discovered them."

"Doris, you are spoiling me."

Her roguery suddenly came to the surface. It was just visible under her manner, but did not usurp the place of her grave and suave graciousness.

"But, then, I have really seen very little of you, Matthew. In time, I may discover them all. Let us hope for the best."

"Yes," he assented, falling in with her mood, "let us hope that you will soon find the myriad of shortcomings which afflict me."

"Since you have set your heart on it, as your dutiful wife I concur in your wish. But I tell you frankly, Matthew, I have very little hope of a fruitful search."

"Doris," he said, greatly moved, "that is really very pretty of you."

"Then why do you not kiss me for paying you so pretty a compliment?"

Tears stood in his eyes, he could not have said why. He was shaken to the very roots of his being by her manner.

"Not at this moment, Doris," he said. "I could not kiss you if I tried."

"Ah, my Matthew, it is well for you that I am not wholly unversed in the ways of men. Some other woman might take mortal affront at those words. Could not kiss me if you tried!" She laughed deliciously, emitting the sweet, throaty sounds that he loved so dearly. "As you refuse to salute me, oh, my husband, I will salute you instead." And, bending over, she kissed him delicately, ravishingly on the brow.

"Doris, Doris," he exclaimed. "My wife—are you, my dear?"

"I am," she affirmed solemnly.

"Doris, Doris, darling, has the time come——"

"Time always comes and always goes, my husband."

"Doris, my wife, how can you jest in my arms like this——?"

"And why not? A jest maketh all life savory."

"Not love, my dearest, not love."

"Even that, my solemn husband."

"Doris—my wife—to hold you in close embrace——"

"You are doing so more closely, my husband, than is comfortable in this warm room, or comports with the safety of my ribs."

He did not reply. He was inarticulate, and contented himself with kissing the sweet hair, the laughing eyes, the dear throat again and again. And, through the mad shower of kisses which he was raining down upon her, he saw that her face was still laughing.

"How you are kissing me," she trilled. "Was it so very difficult, sir husband?"

"Dearest, dearest," he said, "your surrender is sweeter than anything of which I ever dreamed."

"In my heart, dear Matthew, I surrendered long ago. I think I have loved you ever since that day at Diberto Manor when you told me who you really were and why you had come. Yes, I think I loved you then. Yet it is possible that I am mistaken. I may have loved you before —from the very first evening when I saw you—and thought you a friendless, homeless, dying boy.

"Ah, dear, you have been so blind. Your blindness angered me. Because I am weak and full of fears and a woman I loved you for that self-restraint. For the same reasons, though this sounds like nonsense, I wanted to see your self-restraint break and shatter itself to atoms—and I saw it break—once.

"Oh, so very blind you were! So deliciously, incredibly, divinely blind! Anyone else, dearest, but you would have guessed the reason why I held your shabby, thread-

bare, outworn tie to my lips and my cheek. I have been so full of love for you, Matthew, that I have kissed your gloves. Kissed them, Matthew, and held them to my heart, and slept with them against my cheek! I have been so full of love for you, Matthew, that I could have died of shame because you seemed so self-controlled and calm, and I did not dare trust myself to take the initiative, lest the love that hammered and throbbed in my temples and in my heart should cause me to fall from indirection, which is woman's weapon in love, to direction, which is a man's, and make me appear unwomanly and bold."

He was too deeply moved for words.

She buried her head against his shoulder.

"Oh, glorious fool," she whispered, "who went on loving me, though none but a fool, as I think you once said in anger, would have gone on loving me and waiting so patiently. Oh, divinely good man, in return for your devotion and sacrifice I give you a love which is greater, far greater than any love I—at least—have ever deemed it possible to feel."

Exultingly, triumphantly he cried: "My wife, my wife!"

The shadows in the room thickened, crept close and fast about them. Still they sat there, oblivious of the failing light, of the incoming darkness; oblivious of everything but the song of songs in their hearts.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### *A Death-bed Utterance Causes Matthew Ferguson Grave Uneasiness*

Old Mrs. van Duyskuk lay dying. Her room was as neat and trim and prim as ever. As sweet and fresh were the light blue ribbons in her cap, as creamily white the lace of the cap itself. Myriads of fine lines, so fine that one by one they would have been scarcely visible, honeycombed her skin, which was parched and dry with the fever that was eating away her life.

Matthew, sitting at the bedside of the dying woman, her withered, feverish hand lying in the grasp of his own cool, strong one, wondered that skin so dry and hot did not crumble into powder at the touch.

"I have been angry with you many years, Matthew Ferguson," she said in a feeble voice, "but, at the end, the fairy godmother must forgive her favorite godson."

"Dear lady," he said, intensely touched that she should have sent for him for a personal reason in her hour of death, for he had thought she wished to see him in his professional capacity, "the only regret I have in my marriage is that it wounded you."

The feeble old hand trembled perceptibly in his.

"I pray to God in my dying hour," she said, "that there may never come to you any other regret. You have been married how long?"

"Seven years."

"And the boy?"

"Is four years old."

She seemed to ponder that carefully.

"I wanted you to make the other marriage for your own good, and also because I loved the girl. I never forgave you for disappointing me. I would not forgive you now——" she stopped, and he spoke gently.

"You do forgive me now. That is all that is needful."

"You think I forgive you because I am dying. That is not so. I am quite sure that I would not forgive you, even now, if it were not—not——" she sighed deeply and closed her eyes. He thought that the end had intervened, but as he was about to summon the nurse she opened her eyes and continued, "not for the fact that the fairy godmother has no right to desert her favorite godson. I have one thing to say to you, and that is why I sent for you. When the hour comes—if it comes—when you need some one to whom you may speak freely, without fear and without restraint, remember this. Grace Cravatt is your inalienable friend."

Before he could recover sufficiently from his surprise to say anything she closed her eyes and lay breathing softly. Her hand relaxed and he laid it gently upon the counterpane. Silently he made his way from the room, and, having exchanged a few words of condolence with a niece of the sick woman, he left the house.

What was the meaning of Mrs. van Duyskuk's strange behavior? Such is the majesty attending death-bed utterances that Matthew, who at any other time would have ascribed Mrs. van Duyskuk's singular utterances to the reminiscent vagaries of an old woman, or to the recrudescence of dead hopes, now reflected upon them as being charged with prescience, prophetic he knew not of what. It is impossible to feel resentment against those who are as near the grave as was the woman he had just left, and

he smothered the dull rancor her words had occasioned in that they seemed to disparage Doris by their undue praise of Grace Cravatt.

He threw himself into the comfortable seat of his automobile and called to the chauffeur to drive him to the Beecham mansion. Settling himself comfortably, he prepared to take a nap, for he had slept little the night before owing to a midnight session with the Powers. He had cultivated the habit of sleeping at will at odd moments which could not be utilized otherwise.

But for once sleep evaded him. Many recollections crowded upon him, involving Mrs. van Duyskuk's kindness to him during his early days in New York. Barely twelve years had elapsed since he had come to the Empire City to make his fortune with nothing but his brains, five hundred dollars in cash, a color scheme for dressing, and an Infallible System to help him on the road to success. And success he had most certainly achieved. Matthew Ferguson was now referred to by New Yorkers as one of the City's celebrities.

His private practice was enormous, and, if he was not a wealthy man as wealth is understood in the richest city of the world, it was because on more than one occasion he had preferred to keep his hands clean and let the lucre pass him by rather than take unfair advantage of knowledge in his possession.

His career had run forward as on ball-bearing, rubber-tired wheels. But that morning, as he lolled back luxuriously in his automobile, he questioned whether those rubber tires were not to be rudely punctured at last. He was in a rut, and had been for years, but it was a silken-lined, gold-embossed, diamond-studded rut, in which he moved very comfortably indeed. Day by day he plucked the glossy fruits of creature comfort, social importance, civic dignity, professional standing and the conglomerate re-

spect which is tendered the successful by the very street sweepers. Matthew had reached that point in his career when, overburdened with matters of great moment to both clients and himself, he hated any unnecessary pother or worry. A reasonable amount of money he commanded at will, but overwork and worry he could not always avoid.

The paper which he had in his pocket at that moment, and which he was on his way to turn over to Mr. Beecham, was calculated, if he opposed the project which it concerned, to create an endless chain of trouble and work for himself, and to deprive him, in addition, of the prodigious retainer paid him as an annual salary by the Powers, a fee that was over twice as large as the salary with which he had started.

For over a month the Interstate Railway Company had been running not four trains an hour, as had been the original plan, but eight trains an hour through Nth Avenue, and within that period they had killed thirteen children and crippled three. This ghastly record Matthew, as attorney for the Powers, had sought to condone on the grounds that the unusual headway of the trains was responsible for the accidents, and that, as the children became "educated up" to the frequency with which the trains were now forced to run, the record would be materially decreased, possibly wiped out altogether. No one, certainly not Matthew himself, believed the contention, but nevertheless he had set it forth with great aplomb and with all the assurance his name commanded.

And yet, dreadful as was all this, it was a minor consideration. With all the skill of the trained dialectician Matthew contrived to exonerate himself in this regard on the plea that he had not been instrumental in obtaining the original charter under which the Interstate operated on Nth Avenue as far south as Twenty-second

Street. It will be perceived from this that the vulnerable spot which Matthew had discovered one stormy morning at the Battery had assumed something of the pachydermic quality which should characterize a Scientific Egoist throughout. But it was not wholly covered with the protective sheath. Matthew had an uncomfortable and vivid recollection of the time when he had taken an unqualified delight in proceeding against the oppressors in behalf of the down-trodden in spite of the fact that such proceedings had been instigated at the dictates of the Infallible System.

He remembered a saying by Epictetus to the effect that the individual can feel sympathy only with such sorrows of his fellow creatures as may come to himself. Was he, indeed, so selfish that, because it was manifestly impossible that injury should come to his and Doris's child through the Nth Avenue trains, he could feel no sense of outraged humanity for those hapless children who, day after day, as they played in the street in lieu of a better playground, took the risk of having their tender bodies crushed and mangled by the fast-running, heavy steam engines?

He remembered Judge Witherspoon's arguments in behalf of surface trains on that memorable morning five years ago. He had taken very little trouble to thresh the situation out seriously. He had preferred to exonerate himself on the ground that he had not obtained the franchise under which the Interstate operated on Nth Avenue; but—and here was the rub—he had been commissioned by the Powers to devise ways and means for obtaining a new franchise for operating below Twenty-second Street as far south as was necessary from the present city administration, which had maintained throughout a beautiful neutrality toward victims and offenders. In running through the congested lower West

Side there was no doubt in Matthew's mind but that the list of accidents would be increased, not twofold, but fivefold. The prospect made him extremely ill at ease and gloomy.

He concluded that pity for the submerged tenth was by no means dead within him, and as he was always honest with himself he reflected cynically that it was a bad thing for a rich man to have a conscience at all, since self-reproaches tend to undermine the digestion, and the cuisine of the rich more than the table of the poor requires a first-class digestive apparatus. With a harsh laugh, in which there was a good deal of self-contempt, he told himself it was a great pity that the impediment could not be removed by surgical operation, like troublesome tonsils, or useless adenoid tissue.

The latter operation had been performed upon his and Doris's child the year before, and this recollection changed the current of Matthew's thoughts. He adored his son, and was proud of him, but he never fell into the culpably poor taste of referring to him as "my boy." It was always "our little son" when he spoke of the child. He remembered now, all of a sudden, that, in his hurry to obey the summons of Mrs. van Duyskuk, he had left the house without kissing the little lad, who was still in the nursery when his father left home. Doris had told Matthew how unhappy the child had been all day upon the occasion of a similar omission, and Matthew therefore called to the chauffeur to take him home first.

Matthew junior was a small-boned, dark-skinned little lad with dark hair and dark eyes and a mercurial disposition. Doris invariably dressed the little chap entirely in white, which gave him a lordly appearance. He was so unlike either of his parents that he might have been a changeling dropped from the clouds. Matthew remembered that he had been told that his own mother, who

had lived only two years after his birth, had had black hair and black eyes, so that the child, undoubtedly, had received his dark pigmentation as a heritage from a previous generation. The child was born with a quantity of fine, black hair, and at first both physician and nurse had assured the child's parents that the baby would lose the dark hair, and that the succeeding crop would be light, but the prediction had not come to pass. Doris was disconsolate that her little son should be so very dark when his father was fair, and Matthew, seeing how she took the matter to heart, and divining that she shared his sentiment that the son should resemble the father, while the daughter should be like the mother, gallantly suppressed his own disappointment that his first-born was not an exemplar of the pure Anglo-Saxon type.

The little lad had a very winning personality and an elusive charm that was all his own. As soon as he began to creep he manifested an extraordinary delight in sunlight. Sitting on the floor, surrounded by expensive toys, he abandoned these the moment he saw sun rays slanting into the room, and it was an incomparable sight to see him stretch out his chubby baby hands and uncurl his rose-petal baby fingers in hope of catching the pretty golden things he loved. Then he would double up his fat little fist, and bring it close up to his eyes to examine the wonderful thing he had imprisoned but could not feel, and on finding nothing at all, as he uncurled his fingers, his surprise became the climax and the most delicious part of the entire performance. Little Matthew was charmingly good-tempered, for he never showed anger or disappointment at the elusiveness of the thing he had captured, but crowed as lustily as Chanticleer on finding the joke had been on himself.

Matthew and Doris spent many a sweet, wasteful hour watching their baby, and once Matthew poured a handful

of gold eagles over the child's hand, expecting that the boy would be happy to find that for once the bright, glittering things had not eluded capture. But whether the child was troubled by the cold metal, or whether he enjoyed his game just because he could play it over and over without a result of any sort, he cried bitterly, when the gold eagles tumbled about him.

Doris caught the child to her heart.

"Mother's honey doesn't want father's horrid, cold, cold gold," she crooned; "of course, he doesn't! What a silly father he was not to know better."

By the time Little Matthew was a year old, his father was entirely reconciled to the fact that his scion was a dark-complexioned child. Not so Doris. She never expressed any feeling in the matter, and lavished upon the child the golden wealth of her love, but Matthew saw a shadow flit over her face whenever astonishment was expressed by friend or acquaintance at the dissimilarity of Matthew, junior, to Matthew, senior, or to Mrs. Matthew.

The boy raised the noisy clamor of a happy child when his father, after a brief talk with his mother, prepared to leave the breakfast room where he had found them. Doris's quiet, controlled rebukes availed nothing, for Matthew, instead of allowing his wife to manage the boy, began offering the child bribes if he would be content to let his father go. Doris raised her brows with displeasure, and fell silent; and Matthew, junior, having rejected as unacceptable such minor tokens of tribute as a swing, a grocery store, a doll's house, a carousel for his Teddy bears, finally deigned to accept a rocking-horse covered with real pony skin.

"Very well, son," said Matthew, "a rocking-horse it shall be. You will get it this afternoon."

He kissed the child, and Doris came with him into the hall.

They had moved into their Riverside Drive apartment the year after their child was born. It was a two-story apartment, though in reality it was not an apartment at all, but a good-sized house fitted into another much larger house. They had eighteen rooms, three baths, a billiard-room, salon, and a picture gallery. The entire place was finished in irreproachable taste. Matthew and Doris had had a three-days' struggle about the matter of financing their new home. It was finally decided that he would allow Doris to defray the cost of furniture, hangings, and rugs, her own wardrobe and her boy's, but that Matthew should pay the rental, servants, and household expenses.

As a result of Doris's excellent taste and unlimited means the interior of the Ferguson mansion presented an air of harmonious elegance. Matthew was a savage in all matters of art, and, at the time of his marriage, could not have told the difference between a Ming or a Sèvres vase, or even between good porcelain of any kind and ordinary ware. It seemed to him a gigantic absurdity that different sorts of furniture should have different names, and for years Doris tried in vain to teach him to discriminate between such easily recognizable styles as Empire and Louis the Fourteenth. The task was a hopeless one; Matthew could not be made to remember the difference between the three Louis styles; Chippendale and Sheraton were all the same to him, and Hepplewhite and Adam mere names. The general effect of good furniture and rich hangings was agreeable to him; he knew instinctively what was good and what was bad; but he could not or would not bother with getting the names of the styles.

The entrance hall of their apartment was a charming bower of marble and Teplitz statuary, of marble benches,

enormous palms, cacti and rubber plants. It was a delightful lounging room, and Doris drew him down on a marble bench as she chid him gently for his manner with the boy.

"Don't you see, Matthew, that the system of bribery which you habitually employ to get him to behave himself is spoiling his character?" she asked.

"Oh, very well," said Matthew, laughing, "I won't next time. Kiss me, dear, before I go."

"You are not going yet," she said, evading the kiss deftly, "did you see the paper this morning?"

He told her he had not so much as glanced at it.

"They are attacking you horribly," she said.

He reminded her of her promise not to read "that rotten, blackmailing sheet," which was the name he gave the *Bulletin* nowadays.

"Well," she said, "the papers which aren't rotten, blackmailing sheets are doing the same."

"The devil!" said Matthew under his breath, and then apologized for offering this offense to his wife's pretty pink ears. He kissed the pretty pink ear which was nearest to him to help erase the impression of the proffered outrage, but Doris did not respond to his pleasantry.

"Is what they say true, Matthew?"

"How can I tell, Doris, not having seen the papers? I really must go, my dear."

She placed her hands on his shoulders with that wifely authority which changed the gesture from a caress to the prelude of an inquisition. His manner immediately changed from loverlike devotion to spacious forbearance, which is the manner in which men try to mask their meanderings from the twin paths of virtue or honesty.

"I wouldn't pay any attention, dear," he said, "to what

the papers say. Muck-raking is the fashion, and even the good old-timers have to fall in line in order to boom their circulation."

She persisted. She wanted to know whether what they said was true or not. And all the while he wished that she would remove her hands from his shoulders, for she had forced him into an attitude in which it was impossible to avoid her eyes, unless he made that avoidance very obvious. "They all agree, Matthew, that the record of lives lost—all children, by the way—on Death Avenue is a disgrace to a civilized community."

"So it is," he conceded generously, hoping to take the wind out of her sails by acquiescence. "I've got the promise of Cravatt and Beecham to try out every safety equipment known to engineers until we hit upon one that will be an effective safeguard."

"And until then the wholesale slaughter of the babies is to continue?"

"Ugh, Doris, how can you! You got that word out of the *Bulletin*."

"And they, in turn, got it out of the dictionary, whence it is meant to be lifted when occasion demands," said Doris quickly. "It is alleged, moreover, Matthew, that securing the new franchise for continuing Nth Avenue southward will be one of the legal crimes of this decade, and that——"

"I know, I know," he interrupted her, a little impatiently. "I am the only man able to perpetrate such an odious and diabolical scheme. I am the only man who has the brains to devise a plausible plan for getting it, and the only man who is able to railroad that plan through the assembly. Seems to me, my dear, you should be pleased to think your husband is such an intellectual giant."

"I would like my husband to be not only a giant in intellect, but a giant of honesty," she retorted coldly.

Matthew laughed.

"I must go," he said, "to perform my dishonest labors."

Her hands still retained their hold. Lightly as they lay on his shoulders, they were beginning to be irksome. He raised his own hands to his shoulders, unclasped her fingers and held them firmly in his own.

"How very pretty my little wife looks this morning," he said.

"Matthew," she replied aloofly, "there is a time for love-making, and a time for working, and a time for taking an inventory of our spiritual wealth or poverty."

"Doris," he said, showing a little temper, "you may not know it, but I am really very patient under your homilies."

"If you were less patient," she replied, " I would like it better. If you were an innocent man you would have answered me differently."

He laughed easily.

"My dear," he said, "be reasonable. I am the attorney of the Powers and I cannot leave them in the lurch when they need me most. I must get them the extension franchise and I am going to get it. But, after we get it, a year will elapse until the tracks are laid and the trains ready to run on the extension. In that time some means will be found to insure greater safety for the children."

She extricated her hands from his clasp.

"Matthew," she said, "you are not telling me the truth. You may be able to make others believe that untruths are truths, but you cannot hoodwink me."

She stood before him so that he could not possibly get away from her.

"Matthew," she said, "think how fortunate we are in being able to do everything for our little boy. Why not

try to help others who are less fortunate? Years ago you outlined a plan for a Child Welfare Committee, but whenever I broach the subject you evade me. Do you think I do not know why? You were frank with me once. You dare not offend Mr. Cravatt and Mr. Beecham, although once you thought very differently."

"Once," he said, "I admitted that I did not know what was the right thing to do. I know it now. I am intensely sorry for those poor youngsters. But there are other poor people to be considered."

"Don't tell me that yarn about the stockholders again," she said disdainfully.

He struggled to his feet and with gentle force put her to one side.

"I am afraid, Doris," he said in a tone that conveyed the meaning that there were some things a woman simply could not understand, "I am afraid, my dear, that I must do what I consider the right thing, regardless of what you consider right. I am persuaded that I am acting for the best."

"Matthew," she said indignantly, "if you have made up your mind to do this cruel thing I do not suppose that I can get you to do otherwise. But at least do not add hypocrisy to cruelty and inhumanity. You say you are persuaded that you are acting for the best. Persuaded by what? By money interest? Money! When I have so much money that——"

He became angry.

"You know very well," he said shortly, "that I would never permit you to pay one cent toward our housekeeping and actual living expenses."

"Very well," she said, "then, even if you break with those two men, who seem to think they own you body and soul, we can change our way of living so as to keep within your income as an independent lawyer!"

He laughed shortly.

"An independent lawyer," he said. "Do you know who my clients are? Almost exclusively friends of the men 'who seem to think they own me, body and soul,' and if I asserted my independence of them, my dear, you would see my practice dwindle to zero in less time than it takes to tell."

He had spoken with a tinge of bitterness, and the perception that the sting of bitterness was in his soul and on his lips softened her. A look of lovely supplication was in her eyes.

"Matthew, you do not know what this means to me. I think, if any other class were involved, I would not care so much. But children—Matthew—children——"

Her soft mood had more power over him than her harshness. He hardened himself against her appeal. He told himself that he must not allow her to soften him. He even summoned to his aid the ghost of the long-departed System—for which he now had but little use.

"I must be going, really," he said briefly. "I am late now. I was due at the Beecham mansion at ten o'clock and it is a quarter after ten now."

"Matthew," she supplicated, "listen to me, dear, I love you so dearly, so devotedly that I cannot bear to see you do this thing. I cannot bear to have my hero shatter my belief in his heroism. I want to keep my opinion of him intact. Do not refuse me, Matthew. If you will not consent to use my money I promise you willingly that, without a word of regret or of reproach, I will move to the humblest flat which may come within our means. Only keep your hands clean!"

Her breath came spasmodically. He had averted his face, hoping to escape her eyes. The adorably pleading expression in them would haunt him at his desk, in the court room, in the assembly chamber, in Cravatt's meeting

room, whenever and wherever this subject would come up. He was impatient with himself for allowing her to make this impression upon him. And yet he knew that he did not want her to be different. True, it made things difficult for him, but he had the incomparable gratification of knowing that his wife was of the elect in spirit and in heart. It was man's prerogative to fall a little below the standard which he sets up for his women.

"You are a good woman, my dear," he said magnificently, making a fine show of courtesy as he kissed her fingers.

She flung her arms about his neck. For a moment he resisted the effect of the proximity of her sweet, strong body. Then, unconsciously, his arm crept about her waist. To that hour he could not feel the touch of her fingers or inhale the fragrance of her sweet hair without responding in every nerve and muscle. And yet, strong as was her purely feminine allure, he did her the justice to realize that she was exerting it unconsciously, and that she was not seeking to gain her ends through it. So lofty was his notion of her that he knew she would have scorned to embrace such means to compass any end.

Upon him, however, the effect of her allure was irresistible. He must disentangle himself from the arms of the enchantress though her request was a sacred and not an unholy one.

"I must go," he said, kissing her hastily.

She relaxed her arms and drew away from him. Her face wore a pained look.

"Doris," he said, more moved by the entire scene than he cared to admit, "has this been bothering you long? I mean, is my refusal to allow you to figure actively in such a child welfare plan responsible for that strained look of pain that comes at times into your dear face

when you look at our little boy?" In regard to that plan of hers he reflected that ultimately he must contrive to let her have her way.

Her answer surprised him.

"I—I did not know that I sometimes look strained—or pained——" she disavowed, "when I look at—Little Matthew."

"Well, you need not look so guilty about it," he flung back, and, stooping, kissed her once more. "You are too tenderhearted," he said. "When you look at the youngster enjoy him and try not to think of less fortunate mothers."

She offered no comment. He reflected that he had really offered her a first-class wedge for a renewal of her supplications and he was surprised that she had let the opportunity escape.

He bade her good-bye and was half relieved, half disappointed that she did not reopen the case, now that he was weakening. Once out of the house and spinning toward the Beecham mansion in his car he reflected that, having weakened like a fool, fate had not used him according to his folly. If, instead of standing there with that curious look on her face, she had wound her soft arms about his neck and entreated him further, he might possibly have promised what she asked.

## CHAPTER XXV

*In Which the Enchanted Kingdom Is Threatened with Disruption*

A few minutes later the automobile stopped at the Beecham mansion and Matthew sprang quickly to the door. Mr. Beecham, the butler informed him, had been forced unexpectedly to leave for Chicago. There had been no time to telephone. Would Mr. Ferguson kindly mail him the papers to the Auditorium Annex?

Matthew nodded assent and was about to step out of the house when he saw Alison descending the hall stairs. She called down a languid "How-do-you-do" to him and floated into the library, intent, evidently, on a glove she was fastening and giving no further sign of recognizing his existence.

Alison was thinner than ever and her clothes, as usual, were draperies rather than gowns. Everything she wore gave the impression of slipping from shoulders and hips and bust, and, though the material of which her gowns were made was doubtless quite as substantial as the fabrics in which other women clothed themselves, she had a trick of wearing her clothes as if they were diaphanous. Her skirt clung about her like the vestments of a Greek goddess or like gossamer stuffs whipped closely about her by a tempestuous wind.

Matthew, watching her disappear into the library, wondered how any human being could be so attenuated and

yet exist. He had no doubt that she managed part of that gossamer effect of hers by reducing her underwear to the minimum quantity permissible by decency. Comfort he divined to be a negligible quantity for Alison Beecham, as was, indeed, amply attested by the attractive little silk coat which she had donned to sally forth, and which was wholly insufficient as a protection against the raw November morning.

"How is Miss Beecham this morning?" he inquired, standing at the door. His superficial dislike for her had long since grown into a profound mistrust. She had a way of eyeing him—half-amused, half-malicious—that excited in him an inexplicable desire to subject her to physical violence.

"So good of you to inquire. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you, not to-day."

Shrewd though he was, it did not occur to him until afterward that she dropped her left glove deliberately. He picked it up as a matter of course and that brought him into the room and she, with feigned awkwardness, struggled with a button that would not come right while he stood holding the other glove in his hand, awaiting her pleasure. He saw through her purposiveness now, and was tempted to rid himself of the glove by depositing it on a table that stood at hand. Then, amused by her ingenuousness, he decided to await her convenience. He said nothing, wondering how long she would have the hardihood to keep him standing there in the attitude of a lackey.

"So sorry to keep you waiting," she drawled, and put out her hand for the glove. He gave it to her, smiling sardonically.

"I suppose you are preparing for an invasion of the shops?"

"Yes."

"To the milliner and the dressmaker," he suggested.

She retorted by drawling out the surprising statement that she had no dressmaker, whereupon he, prompted by some demon of mischief to see if anything could sting her out of her languor, committed an unforgivable breach of etiquette.

"No dressmaker? Do you make your own clothes?"

"Do they look as if I did?"

"Really, I never examined them closely enough to say." The agreeable sensation of waving a red flag before a bull was too delicious a pleasure to be foregone. "I dare say you could do as well or better than the dressmaker who ordinarily fits you."

With lowered eyes and apparently with the utmost good nature she explained that she never employed a mere dressmaker, but that an artist designed all her clothes. She looked at him frankly with a friendly smile. It struck him that there was something ominous in this smiling good-fellowship of hers, after his impertinence. He knew, before she spoke again, that she would revenge herself thoroughly.

"How is your wife?" she inquired. The languid voice purred softly like a kitten.

"Very well, thank you."

"And *her* little boy?"

Matthew set his jaws tautly. What did Alison mean?

"Our little boy is quite well, thank you," he said.

"He is a charming child," she patronized. "I saw Mrs. Ferguson in the park the other morning with him and her little boy seems a remarkably attractive child."

Matthew was furious.

"Miss Beecham, my wife's little boy is also my little boy. He is not her child by her first husband, as you seem to think."

"No, I did not think that." Her impudence was co-

lossal. "I did not remember that he was your child. I hardly know what I thought."

Matthew wondered how the man who would marry Alison Beecham would contrive not to beat her.

"I always will forget that he was born after Mrs. Ferguson married you," she continued. "So stupid of me. I suppose it's because he doesn't resemble either of you in the least. Resemblances are queer things, aren't they?"

"Lack of resemblance, I think you mean."

"I mean both, of course," she drawled.

Her insolence staggered him.

"I beg your pardon?" he stammered.

"It is so curious—your little boy is the image of a man I met abroad last year. I forget his name."

Matthew's voice was thick with anger.

"That is curious, indeed," he retorted.

Sanity whispered in his ear to say no more, to assume a slow-wittedness which was alien to him and to feign ignorance of the intended insult. But anger was pounding in his brain like a hammer.

"Lack of resemblance to parents is not uncommon," he added almost immediately. "No one would think of Mr. Beecham as your father, for instance."

He was almost ashamed of retaliating even as he spoke, and he fully sensed the danger of what he was doing. It was folly to prod Alison Beecham, for she was not a woman to curb her tongue either in anger or in cold blood.

She arched her eyebrows in the direction of a full-length portrait of a young woman in the costume of the period of the Civil War.

"I resemble my mother's mother, at least, so I am told."

Glancing hastily at the portrait, Matthew saw that he had no grounds for gainsaying the statement.

"Apparent lack of resemblance," she said swiftly, in a manner different from her usual stealthiness, "is usually only resemblance to some forgotten—or overlooked—relative. I wish I could remember the name of the man whom your little boy resembles. I think he is a relative of yours, or Mrs. Ferguson's, for he was seen often in your society five or six years ago, when he spent a winter in New York. He is of medium height, very handsome, distinguished, and dark—like your little boy."

Sanity whispered its counsel in Matthew's ear once more. He strove to heed it.

"I am afraid I cannot help you out, Miss Beecham. I must be going."

She held out her hand, and, though he longed to strike it, so angry was he, the habit of social amenity is strong, and he took it conventionally in his own.

She smiled up into his face.

"His name is something like Chevalier—Cheval—Echevel——"

"Echevverria!" The name flashed upon Matthew's consciousness accompanied by a troupe of recollections. Men speak lightly of feeling the blood recede from the heart, and yet it is an experience that comes to most men not more than once in a life-time. Matthew had gone through much pain and distress for Doris's sake, but this sensation was the most poignant he had experienced.

He still held Alison's hand in his, and, so completely did his self-control vanish, that his hand contracted, compressing as in a trap the hand of the woman which had been extended for a Judas-like handshake. So utterly self-centered was he at the moment that Alison, all her languor gone at last, squirmed with the agony of that iron grip before he realized to what torture he was putting her.

"You are hurting me," she gasped.

Then a curious thing happened. The demon that lies dormant in most men and some women leaped into vigorous life. She had hurt him and he was hurting her. That was as it should be. It was the law, not the meek Christian law which exhorts the man who has been smitten on one cheek by an enemy to turn the other also, but the red-blooded, honest Hebraic law so beautifully natural in its ferocity: "An eye for an eye——"

He did not release his grip. Consciously now he exerted additional pressure. Alison gave a cry of pain and with her free hand tried to unclasp his tenaciously clutching fingers. He laughed wickedly, as, with an inarticulate moan, she dropped to her knees. He felt a fiendish glee in seeing her, the languid, lofty, supercilious creature, thus humiliated and shamed.

"Let me go," she moaned; "Oh, let go my hand." He thought for one moment that, finding her free hand unavailing in her effort to release the captive hand, she would use her teeth. But shame, or breeding, or disgust in touching anyone's hand with her teeth, frustrated her plan. He laughed again and then flung her off. She struggled to her feet unassisted.

"If you were a man I would have killed you," he said succinctly and with indescribable relish.

He walked out of the room and out of the house. In his agitation he forgot that his automobile was waiting at the door and strode off in the direction of the Drive.

His head was on fire; his heart cast into a furnace. His excitement was so intense that for the moment he could hardly remember the cause of that excitement. Like a madman he uttered incoherent words. In his head reigned chaos; in his heart ungovernable fury.

And yet he felt neither resentment nor anger against Alison, or Doris, or Little Matthew, or Echevverria, for,

though he was wrath incarnate, his fury had no objective, or, rather, its objective was so universal that it could not single out any individual as a target.

It required an effort of the will to recall circumstantially what had occurred, and presently, in cold blood, he began to consider the plausibility of the slur Alison had cast upon his wife. But the anger which had submerged his brain so completely a few moments ago had vitiated his capacity to think. Alison had implied something horrible about Doris. But were her allegations true?

His ears burned as he realized that he was doubting Doris. To him Doris was a saint. Doris was incapable of doing wrong. Doris was the best and truest of women, and he was a brute to give any thought at all to Alison's abominable words. But the mechanism of associative recollection flashed before him pictures of certain incidents of the past. A chain of damning recollections undulated before him: Doris's failure to explain in what relation Echevverria had stood to her; Doris's horrible agitation on the night on which he had first discovered them together; the enormous check which she had given him ostensibly for charity. He remembered that Tommy had persisted in calling his attention to the check, but he, blind fool, had attached no importance to it. Doris's cruel disappointment in that the boy was dark-haired and dark-eyed; and, last of all, the worried, strained look that came into her face so often when she looked at the boy.

Suddenly he laughed aloud—hideously. Only that morning he had attributed that look to her saintly desire to help mothers less fortunately circumstanced than herself; and there came to him, with terrible intensity, a new construction of the singular look her face had worn when he had mentioned this. Every tiny link seemed to rivet the chain of guilt upon her. In a terrible paroxysm

of passion, physical as well as spiritual, his heart cried out for certainty at all costs.

Suddenly he remembered his automobile. He was twenty blocks away from the Beecham mansion by this time. He stood still, wondering whether to go back or to hail a taxi, when, purring gently, the automobile stopped beside him.

"I thought, sir," said the chauffeur, showing the indulgence of his class for the vagaries of the particular genius he happened to serve, "that you might get tired walking after a while."

"I certainly am tired of walking," said Matthew springing into the car. "Home."

Curiously enough, he wondered what usage the etiquette of the well-bred prescribed for a man who had been used as Doris had used him. He felt a sudden fear of encountering her, an alarm that his conduct would fall short of the conventional standard.

Would he desire to hurt Doris as he had gloried in hurting Alison Beecham? Respect, admiration and love of her were a habit, and he did not believe that he could disentangle himself from the silken fiber of custom. It was such a novelty to be angry with Doris, to think of her in the light of a woman who has sinned. Doris—a woman who had sinned! Preposterous.

He told himself that it was all a nightmare. By the time he entered his own apartment he had exonerated Doris to his complete satisfaction. All he required as the crowning evidence of her innocence was a glimpse of his boy's face; for a curious thing had happened to him—the nervous shock Alison Beecham had given him rendered him incapable of summoning a vision of his boy's face at will.

He went direct to the nursery. Little Matthew had fallen asleep among his toys. The child's beautiful head

reposed upon a huge Teddy bear; one small dark hand rested on the pale blue blanket the maid had thrown over him. The other hand—pink palm upward—was tucked under the child's chin. Poor Matthew's heart seemed to bound out of his body at the sight. It was a position in which Matthew had seen his son innumerable times; but to-day, rich in baleful recollection, there loomed beside the sleeping child the figure of Alfons Echevverria, chin in cupped hand, reciting "An Ode to a Skylark."

A sudden faintness came over Matthew. He stumbled from the room and down the stairs.

"Matthew!" Doris, coming from one of the rooms of the lower floor, met him in the hall. "Why, what is the matter?" she asked. "What has happened? How strange you look?"

He struggled to control himself, and, without answering, walked to the door. She ran to his side and, in her alarm, seized his arm. "What has happened?" she asked again. "Are you ill?"

"No, I am not ill."

His one wish at the moment was to get away from her before he had a chance to say some hideous thing with which he would reproach himself as long as he lived.

"I must go," he said.

"Matthew, do not go like this! I have never seen you look like this!"

He struggled valiantly to check the outrageous words that were striving for utterance.

"Not now," he said. "Not now, Doris. Let me go."

"Matthew!" she entreated.

He put her away from him not ungently and said again that he must go. Out in the street he wondered what next to do. Unutterable weariness dragged at his limbs. He might have been wandering through the streets at

random and alone all that day and all night. The river was lapped in smoky, murky light, and the sky was veiled with it, shimmering like a bowl made of dark abalone shell. Through the magic of this delicate slate-color that enveloped all the world the outlines of the denuded trees became pillars of irregular shape and great beauty.

He wondered vaguely that he should be able to see and to feel the beauties of air, earth and sky when his happiness lay shattered at his feet. What should he do next?

The Cravatt mansion was only five blocks away from the Ferguson apartment, and Matthew found himself presently in front of the great white pile where he and Doris had been entertained so often. Mrs. van Duyskuk's singular utterance of that morning came back to him. Was this the time of need she had foreseen? His cheeks flamed with the shame of realizing that others had known! Had all the world known except himself?

Now, if ever, he needed a friend. All his splendid initiative seemed to forsake him, and, with Mrs. van Duyskuk's injunction ringing in his ears, he entered the Cravatt mansion and demanded to see Miss Cravatt.

When Grace came into the room where he was waiting for her, at sight of his worried face, the look of alarm which almost invariably came into her face on first shaking hands with Matthew was wiped away. She gave him her hand with shy greeting.

"Mrs. van Duyskuk is dead," she told him. "I had a telephone message five minutes ago."

Matthew wondered vaguely whether Mrs. van Duyskuk had been indiscreet enough to tell Grace anything of what she had said to him. He sat regarding Grace gravely, wondering what he was to say to her now that he was here. He really could not tell why he had come. All was blurred and hazy before his eyes, and suddenly

the wonderfully sweet feeling that he was with a friend whom he could trust absolutely and who would serve him if she could swept over him like a beatitude. He dropped his head between his hands, and, regardless of appearances, he sat thus he knew not how long.

When he raised his face at last he saw that Grace Cravatt was standing in precisely the same attitude at the window. Regarding her he became aware of a change in her. Never had she seemed so womanly, and it occurred to him that, in sending him to her, old Mrs. van Duyskuk had known that her mere presence would help him if he were in trouble. He must deal gently with Doris, that was certain. And he must get her to tell him the truth.

"Miss Cravatt," he said, "you are accustomed to my doing unusual things. You will forgive me, if, without saying anything at all, I go away again? I am in deep trouble and I felt the need of a friend. Merely being with you has helped me."

Grace Cravatt looked at him with a white face.

"Before you go I have something to say to you," she said, swallowing hard. "It is this. If we have a friend, or a sister, or a—a—anyone whom we love very dearly and whom we know to be good and upright we must not allow evil-minded persons to sow suspicion in our hearts against such a person, although the evil-minded ones apparently are right. You know——" her voice shook with a sense of her own courage in offering advice to the great Matthew Ferguson, "you know we must have faith—not only affection for those whom we love. Love alone—without faith—is not love."

Matthew was deeply touched. The dying woman had done him a good turn indeed in sending him to Grace Cravatt.

"Thank you," he said, "you have helped me more than I can say, Miss Cravatt."

"I have something more to say to you." The white, childlike face grew charmingly pink. "I have decided to join an Episcopalian sisterhood whose object is the relief of destitute cancer patients."

"Ah!" he exclaimed. He rebuked himself sharply for making such havoc of her life. She continued, bravely, and with an unashamedness which clothed her habitual straightforwardness in a new dignity.

"I want all my friends to know that I am happy in taking this step, and I do not want them to feel any regrets for me. There are women who, having loved one man, can marry another and be happy; and there are other women who feel that the treasure of their love is too fine a thing to be bestowed unless bestowed ungrudgingly and without reservation. I think such women sometimes are happier if circumstances arise which do not allow them to marry the man they love, because their love is really a species of idolatry, and is so much bigger than themselves that, if its fulfillment came to them, they would stagger under the weight of that fulfillment as under a burden. That happiness would be so wonderfully great that mere contemplation of it makes them afraid, because they know that no human being is worthy of being so divinely happy as they would be if that love had been fulfilled. They feel that the happiness of having given such a perfect love is joy enough for any one human heart. To have received such a love in addition to having given it would be too great a gift. And—and—that is all I wanted you to know."

He raised her fingers to his lips.

"God bless you," he said. "I shall remember you always, and all you have said, and all you have done for me to-day."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### *In Which Matthew Ferguson Deals Unusually with an Unusual Situation*

The half-hour he spent with Grace Cravatt had erased all anger from his heart. He was quite sane once more, and he was determined to hold his judgment in abeyance until he had given Doris a chance to defend herself. Once only, as he turned in at his own door, did temptation assail him. It whispered, "What need that anyone should know? What need to speak to her about this? You cannot live without her. Will you divorce her? Deprive yourself forever of the sweetness of her love? Men there were, he dimly understood, who ignored their wives' infidelities. But he laughed the tempter to scorn. He, Matthew Ferguson, would know the truth.

Face to face with Doris at last, the enormity of the offense with which he was about to charge her assumed proper proportions for the first time. If Doris had done that which his entire soul declared she had not done then, indeed, she had committed a sin so foul as to beggar description. She had consented to become his wife in reality the day that Echevverria finally left New York. Her guilt, in consequence, would be so horrible as to make the marital infidelities of other women appear as trifling indiscretions.

"What is it, Matthew? Will you not tell me?" she asked. "What has happened?"

Shivering, he threw himself into a chair. A terrible

white-hot shame invaded him. He was not conscious of any other sensation, neither anger nor jealousy. Shame filled him to repletion. He overflowed with it; shame at what it was necessary for him to say to her.

With sweet wifely solicitude she knelt at his side. She chafed his hands and laid a kiss first upon one hand and then upon the other. "Are you ill, Matthew?" she crooned. "Has the clash with the Powers come? What if it has, husband mine, what if it has?"

"It is not that," he said and sighed.

"What then, my Matthew? Is there any trouble that will not be lightened if you allow me to share it?" she entreated, Portia-like.

He looked at the sweet, honest face smiling up into his with the smile in which merriment was usurped by gravity, sympathy, and love. It came to him that the mere mention of a guilt such as the one he was about to impute to her was tantamount to insulting her purity. What ignominy, then, was he about to hurl at her in leveling that accusation against herself? And he was her husband and had sacredly covenanted to honor her. He appeared odious to himself, a Grand High Inquisitor. His opinion, also, of the husbands who ignored their wives' infidelities veered. Did shame such as was suffusing him hold some of those husbands in the spell of silence?

"You must tell me, Matthew," she said.

His inertia gave way. He caught her by the shoulders in a grip that made her wince.

"Doris," he cried, "whom do you think your boy resembles?"

Her face went gray; into her eyes came a curious expression, if not of guilt then of expectation and fear realized.

That look in her eyes drove him frantic. All at once he became desperate.

"Answer me!" he cried and shook her roughly. She unclasped his fingers and rose to her feet, standing before him erect, calm, and suddenly fearless.

"I have wondered—often—that you did not notice the resemblance before," she said with superb disdain.

Colossal assurance of the guiltless woman or colossal impudence of the guilty—which?

"You admit——"

She interrupted him quickly.

"That Little Matthew resembles the man who called himself Alfons Echevverria. It remains only to be told who that scamp really was."

"Who——?"

"He was my first husband's twin brother whom we believed dead. He was Vincent Diberto."

"I do not see that the juggling of names makes any difference," said Matthew. "It does not affect the fact."

Doris's brow contracted.

"To what fact do you refer?" she asked bravely.

For one moment her tranquillity abashed him. How could he make his accusation any plainer?

"Do not pretend to misunderstand me, Doris," he said. "Your son does not resemble me, your husband, but another man. Well?"

He noticed that she was forced to moisten her lips before replying.

"Our son," she said, "yours and mine, resembles my first husband."

"Your first husband's brother," he said thickly.

"Oh!" she cried, "you accuse me——?"

"I ask you to defend yourself."

"Oh, Matthew," she gasped, and her self-control wavered. Miraculously his own returned as he saw hers breaking.

"You expressed surprise that I had not noticed the re-

semblance until to-day. You must, then, be prepared to offer some defense."

"Oh, Matthew," she said in a heartbroken voice, "is this you? Could you not have asked for an explanation instead of a defense?"

He led her to a chair. He spoke very gently after she was seated.

"Do not let us quibble, Doris. I did not mean to use an offensive word, or to convey through it an offensive implication." He felt that he was treating her very magnanimously. The fact remained that she had expected him to accuse her some day. His belief in her guilt was imperceptibly strengthened thereby. Doris was not acting as he had anticipated. He did not know specifically what he had expected, but he had been sure that she would, with one word, clear herself magnificently and send him to his knees begging for pardon. That was what he had expected, counted on, and hoped for. The reality was brutally different.

"It seems to me," he continued, "that this resemblance is open to one construction only. If you can supply a different construction, I wish you would do it."

"You are terrible," she said. "I thought you would be angry when you discovered the resemblance, and I dreaded your anger, but I did not expect a cold-blooded court-martial."

"You are fencing," he said. "Had you not better come to the point?"

She interlocked her fingers nervously.

"I have no explanation to offer. None," she declared.

"That means——?"

"That I admit that I am guilty? Oh, no, Matthew, by no means."

He became angry. The impenetrable mystery became more densely shrouded by her refusal to speak.

"Look here," he said, "because I am gentle with you do not imagine that I am not determined to sift this to the bottom. Was this man, Vincent Diberto, your lover?"

"Oh, intolerable!" she cried, her face crimson.

"No evasions, if you please. Was he your lover?"

"No, no," she gasped. "A hundred times, no. How can you think such a thing?"

"How can I think anything else?"

"Be reasonable, Matthew. Now that you know Echeverria's identity, you know as much as I do. It was, of course, a terrible shock to me to see Vincent, whom I had believed dead, reappear, and it was anything but a pleasant shock."

"That does not explain the resemblance," said he.

"I cannot explain it," she said. "It exists. That is all I know about it."

"If you had really loved me," he continued, the fangs of jealousy biting and worrying him, "you would have told me who he really was."

"I admit that it was almost unforgivable that I did not, Matthew, but therein, in my silence, lies my entire guilt. I have been terribly punished."

"Why didn't you speak out? Why didn't you tell me?"

She covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

"Oh, Matthew, Matthew," she cried, "you are breaking my heart. You have been so patient, so divinely good to me in the past, say now, dearest husband, that you believe me guiltless?"

"How can I say that when I do not believe it?" he said brokenly.

She wept passionately. Then her tears stopped as abruptly as they had begun.

"I cannot prove that I did no wrong," she said; "if

your knowledge of my character, my habits, and my truthfulness does not offset the one fact against me—I cannot prove my innocence."

She resumed her fitful weeping. There came to him a desire, prompted wholly by affection and pity, to take her in his arms and soothe her. He restrained the wish.

"Doris," he said, when there came a lull in her weeping, "tell me this one thing. Why did you not tell me who this man was?"

She stretched out her left hand to him with an imploring gesture. He did not take it and it dropped back into her lap. Her under lip quivered like a child's.

"Do you hate me?" she implored.

"You know that I do not," he said, consciously bracing himself against the appeal in her voice. "But I must know the truth."

Again she stretched out her hand. Again he did not take it.

"Do you despise me so deeply," she cried, "that you will not even hold my hand?"

He touched her hand perfunctorily. It was cold as marble. Once before, as he remembered with a start, had he seen her in so demoralized a condition—the day when they had been married, when she had avowed her fear of Colonel Chalmers. He gathered from her present state of collapse what agonies she must have lived through for years in expectation of the moment when he would discover the staggering resemblance. Guilty or not, his chivalry would not permit him to deny her present comfort. He chafed her hand gently.

"Matthew," she said in a low, frightened, entreating voice. "You saved me from sadness once; do not cast me into utter darkness now."

"My dear girl!" The pathos of her appeal wrung his heart. "My dear girl," he repeated. With a heartbroken

sob, she laid her head against his shoulder and abandoned herself to the luxury of weeping in his arms.

"Oh, Matthew," she said finally, "there was a time when I fought against loving you, and there was a time when I struggled to love you. And now, now that I love you whole-heartedly, devotedly, now that you are my mainstay, my staff, my strength, I cannot do without you and your love. Doubt me, believe me guilty, but do not stop loving me."

"Doris," he said, "I honestly believe that I never loved you more truly, more honorably than at this moment. But, just because my love is an honorable love, and because I respect you, you must comprehend, dear, that it is impossible to leave the matter unsettled. I want you to answer a few questions, Doris, in a straightforward, direct way; and always remember, my wife, that I am quite as anxious and as eager as yourself to clear you."

"Ask what you will," she said.

"I am asking this question for the third time. Why did you not tell me that Echevverria was Vincent Diberto?"

"For two reasons. Mistaken loyalty toward my first husband, who had been so fond of his twin brother, held me silent, for I could not bear to think that Lawrence's brother, once his identity became known, would go to prison."

"My dear, what are you talking about?" Matthew asked in surprise.

"You forget, Matthew—he had committed a penal offense. He had forged a check for thirty thousand dollars."

"And did he tell you that disclosure of his identity would send him to prison?"

"Yes."

Matthew laughed.

"My dear," he said, "you were the only person in the world who could possibly have had him committed for that offense, and even you would have had insuperable difficulties in proving your case. You spoke of another reason—what was it?"

"Fear of your jealousy, Matthew, for you are jealous. And I loved you so intensely. Then, when Vincent appeared, I cannot tell you what sensations were aroused in me. His coming seemed like a message from the grave —a threat or a warning. And yet I knew I had a right to love you and a right to your love. I knew I had a right to be happy with you and to make you happy; nevertheless, the struggle, while it lasted, was terrible. I think those six months after Lawrence's death at Diberto Manor, when I spent many hours every night in that black room with the records of his voice and the portrait, must have left their mark on me in some way. I cannot describe to you what I passed through while Vincent was here. His resemblance to Lawrence seemed greater than ever, and yet I knew he was utterly worthless and bad."

"If you had not known," Matthew interrupted her quickly, "that he was utterly worthless and bad would it have made a difference?"

Doris shivered.

"How can I say?" she said. "I think not, because, Matthew, as I have told you once before, I loved you more dearly than I had believed possible. Surely, that ought to suffice you. But it was just this realization, this knowledge of my greater love for you, that made me take Vincent's presence so to heart. Oh, surely," she cried passionately, "you must comprehend what I lived through those dreadful days——"

He sat with lowered head. His heart said, "She cannot be guilty; this is not the accent of a guilty woman."

But hard-headed reason said, "There remains the indubitable fact."

"Doris," he said at last, "you know that you always have seemed to me the incarnation of goodness and purity. When first you noticed this odd resemblance you must have sought to explain it to yourself. Tell me, then, how did you explain it?"

She hung her head.

"The very day my baby was born, when they laid the little dark-haired, dark-skinned creature in my arms I saw the resemblance. I was sick with terror, and I have wondered since that the nervous shock did not kill me. I have a photograph in my possession taken of Lawrence when he was only a few days old. Little Matthew at birth was the image of that baby pictured by the faded little photograph of long ago."

"Did you look frequently at that photograph, or at any other photograph, of Lawrence before Matthew's birth?"

"No. I had packed away everything belonging to Lawrence in one large trunk, and I have not opened it since I married you."

Another thought flashed upon him. It was so hideous a clue that, in his agitation, he began pacing the floor.

"Doris," he said excitedly, "did you ever lose consciousness or faint while alone with Vincent?"

"No, I never fainted in all my life. Not when I lifted Lawrence in my arms on that dreadful day seven years ago and saw he was dying; not even before—when you accused me——"

He sat down beside her. Her disavowal of having fainted while alone with Vincent Diberto quieted him strangely. By sheer effort of his indomitable will he had forced his emotions into the background. His legal intuition now was quick to see the point, so prodigiously in her favor that, if guilty, she, being shrewd and quick-

witted, would have availed herself of the loop-hole he had afforded her by replying in the affirmative.

"It happens sometimes, Doris," he said gently, "that we have lapses of memory. Were you often alone with him?"

"Only twice. The day you came home unexpectedly and found us together—it was the first time he called—and the day before he left."

"The day before he left?" Matthew probed her with a searching look. Her eyes refused to meet his gaze. What was she withholding?

He waited, and, after a little while, she resumed.

"You see, I had been warned against him and his coming."

"Warned? By whom——?"

She interlocked her fingers. She was intensely agitated. Again he did not hurry her, but waited patiently. Finally she spoke.

"Do you remember Miriam Blasher?"

"Miriam Blasher?"

"Mrs. Blasher. The woman who came in to see me twice in one evening just before Vincent came to New York; she had a little boy who was a consumptive."

There rose before his mind's eye a vision of the poor, faded, shabby little woman, nondescript of dress, of age, of sex almost, who, on one ill-fated evening, like a baleful shadow, had interrupted his love-making.

"Yes," he said, "I remember her."

"Well, she was Vincent's wife."

Matthew uttered an ejaculation of surprise. It seemed incredible that the polished, attractive, showy man of the world who had called himself Alfons Echevverria should have been the husband of that poor creature. He felt contempt for Vincent in making so ill-advised a match.

"After their child was born he treated her abominably," Doris continued. "He practically deserted her. She located him, and he consented to make her a monthly allowance, but this was such a pittance that it was wholly insufficient for her needs. Finally, he offered to increase the allowance if she would take a different name—Blasher—go across to New Jersey and sue him for divorce on the grounds of desertion. A divorce by a resident of New Jersey can be obtained after two years. She was willing to do this but demanded some guarantee that the allowance would actually be paid, and, finally, he promised her, while she was living here in the city, that he would pay her the sum of a hundred dollars a month until she obtained the divorce—making glowing promises regarding what he would do for her once she had given him his freedom. He told her there was a rich woman whom he felt sure he could marry and he offered to settle on Mrs. Blasher the sum of twenty thousand dollars if he was able to bring about this marriage. The woman was desperate and she consented.

"Still he did not send her money. She wanted to get her boy away to the country, and, on that evening when she came here, she was half-crazed with fear and worry. When she came here the first time she did not know who I was, curious as that may seem to you. She had come into my apartment with me a number of times, but she did not know my name. Her preoccupation with her own troubles, I suppose, had kept her from asking for it.

"Well, I was so intensely sorry for her and had been right along that I had made out a check for five hundred dollars for her, and when she came the first time that evening I begged her not to be offended, but to take the gift for the sake of her child. She was deeply touched, and accepted it. After she reached home she looked at the check, and, for the first time, knew that I, Matthew

Ferguson's wife, was the woman her husband was going to try to win in his own devious fashion. She came back immediately and told me."

"Good Heavens, Doris!" Matthew was on his feet, indignant and angry. "The man is a greater villain than I suspected. And you knew all this about him and did not tell *me*, your husband? Why, he is worse than Colonel Chalmers."

"You are mistaken. The idea of this campaign against me originated with Colonel Chalmers. Because I spent the first two years of our marriage abroad, he judged that I was not happy with you, and, when Vincent Diberto turned up one fine day, with a request for a loan, the Colonel incubated this new villainy."

"We cannot expect honesty from rogues," said Matthew, "but how you could keep all knowledge of such a detestable plot from me I cannot fathom. I consider that, in a way, your silence made you their accomplice."

"Oh, no, Matthew, no, no!" she cried.

"Are you keeping anything else back? You had better be perfectly frank with me, now."

"The money I gave Vincent Diberto was not for charity. It was to—to—make him leave New York."

"You paid tribute to a rogue! Oh, Doris!"

She shrank away from him, and seemed to lose in stature, to shrivel away under the white-hot intensity of his glance.

"I—I made him an annual allowance," she said defensively, "to be paid him quarterly. After all, Matthew, I felt that, as old Pietro Diberto's nephew, he really had as much right to the money as I have. Besides, if Lawrence had known that his brother was alive, he would have made a different will."

"How much are you paying him?"

"Half of my income," she replied in a frightened voice.

Matthew laughed.

"Why not three-fourths or seven-eighths?" he asked ironically. "Oh, Doris, Doris, it is incomprehensible that you, knowing how I loved you, instead of telling me all this should have preferred to submit to a thing I can find no name for, unless, indeed, it is blackmail."

"Blackmail! Hardly, Matthew. Blackmail is paid only by the guilty, is it not?"

"Are you quite sure, Doris, that you are innocent?"

"I hoped that you were certain of that also by this time," she replied.

"I am less confident of your innocence than I was at the outset," he replied. "I can tell you frankly, Doris, that when I began this interview it was with an overwhelming feeling in your favor, for the habit of respect and faith in you is tenacious from use and formed a strong offset against the one damning fact that spoke against you. Now——" he shrugged his shoulders. "I know now that you deliberately lied to me in order to shield a man whom you knew to be a rogue in more ways than one; I know, furthermore, that you deliberately connived at the deception he practised as to his identity; I know, also, that you have been paying over to him enormous sums of money for the past five years. I am afraid," he concluded his charge, "that your case is in a very bad state indeed."

"Matthew," she cried, "surely you do not mean——"

"I mean," he said, his jaws set with iron determination, "that, if you lied to me once, you will, when occasion demands, lie to me again. Of the fact that the present occasion demands a lie there seems to be overwhelming proof."

She went dead white. She said in an awe-stricken voice, as if the statement she was making were too hor-

rible for credence: "It is possible that you believe me guilty!"

"I have yet to hear your defense," he said coolly. "I have asked you for it repeatedly. You have had five years in which to prepare it, but, in spite of that period of time, it seems to have been too great a tax on your ingenuity. All I have heard so far is circumstantial evidence of a deadly nature against you."

He picked up his hat from the floor and went to the door. She reached it before him and, leaning against it, she stood confronting him.

"You shall not leave me like this," she cried passionately. "Do you realize of what you are accusing me? If I were guilty of this unspeakable thing, then, when I signified to you my willingness that our marriage should be a marriage indeed, I must have done so from motives so foul and base as to be without a parallel."

"I have thought of that," he said in a cold, passionless voice.

"Oh, God!" she cried in a crescendo of passion. She turned and beat her hands against the panels of the door. Then she faced him again, breathing tumultuously.

"What do you mean to do?" she cried. "What are you going to do?"

He stood regarding her with the utmost composure. There passed before him in quick retrospection the gallant fight he had made for her sanity, for her love, for her faith in him. He realized, too, that, in spite of his apparent tranquillity, his feelings were too deeply engaged to allow him to take an impartial view of the situation. Suddenly as she stood there the ice-bound currents of his heart seemed to thaw, and he became overwhelmingly aware that, in spite of everything, he loved her; that his love overshadowed every other consideration and streamed over the black sea of doubt and mistrust in

which he was floundering. It beckoned to him, like a beacon light, to be gallant and chivalrous just once more. He trusted to the inspiration of the moment and his words came as a surprise to himself.

"I do not mean to divorce you, Doris, if you mean that. You may have broken *your* marriage vows; at this moment I believe that you have. But I do not see that this circumstance absolves me from mine, although, in a modified form, that spirit of retaliation usually is considered an honorable revenge. If my sister, instead of my wife, had done the thing which I believe you have done, what a contemptible cur I would be to withdraw from her my protection and my love! As my wife you are as dear to me—or dearer—than any sister could have been, so that, if I were to exact legal redress—divorce you—I would be acting from the smallest motives of which the human heart is capable—petty vanity and wounded self-love parading under the guise of righteousness."

"Oh," she whispered, "the Matthew I know, the Matthew I love, my own Matthew is speaking now."

"Furthermore, Doris, I say this. I realize fully what the provocation must have been to commit this—this offense. I realize that, in seeing this rogue, who bore such a striking resemblance to your first husband, you may have been tempted beyond your strength——"

"Do not go on, do not go on," she panted; "I am innocent, I swear it by everything that is sacred to me. I am innocent. As for that former love of mine, I have answered you before."

He shrugged his shoulders. He tucked his hat under his arm and began drawing on his gloves. She opened the door for him and stepped aside to let him pass and at that moment they heard the patter of little feet running down the hall. Doris closed the door quickly and,

her hand against her bosom, she peered anxiously into her husband's face.

"Let me in, let me in," cried Matthew, junior; his small fists pounded vigorously at the door.

"Open the door," Matthew commanded quietly.

"You will not——" she begged.

He looked at her and smiled, and his smile reassured her. She opened the door and little Matthew came bounding in.

"Daddy!" he hurled himself against Matthew and clung to his hands. Would Daddy take him for an automobile ride? Would Daddy stay home? Would Daddy take him to the park? The small, dark child showed febrile nervousness in even greater degree than usual Matthew thought.

"I must go to the office, Matthew, so I cannot take you for a drive in the park," he said.

"Then take me with you to the office, and have Tommy take me home," begged the youngster.

Matthew glanced at Doris, who was regarding him with a look divided between hope and fear lest he treat the child differently than usual.

If Matthew felt any revulsion at sight of the boy, who at that moment must have appeared to him as a living monument of his wife's infidelity, he suppressed his emotion admirably. He stooped and lifted the child to his arms. The youngster crowed delightedly.

"If your mother is satisfied you may come with me," he said.

Doris, struggling to suppress her tears, nodded assent. Glancing at her, Matthew had a luminous vision of the medley of feelings which were disturbing her. Relief and gratitude and entreaty shone from her eyes. Entreaty for what? He pondered a moment and hazarded a guess.

He placed the child on his feet.

"Run and get your things on, son," he said.

Doris's face lighted up with a gratitude the pathos of which wrung his heart. She closed the door behind the child, whom they heard calling for his nurse to hurry and dress him as he pattered upstairs.

Matthew's voice was wonderfully gentle when he addressed Doris.

"You did not think, did you, that my manner toward the child, who is wholly innocent of his parentage, would change? He is *your* child, at any rate, and that, for the present, must suffice. And, Doris, I am going to say now what you would not let me say before. You have my forgiveness. I believe you were tempted beyond your strength—beyond any mortal woman's strength—and I pity you commensurately. All I ask is an acknowledgment of your guilt so that honesty and truth may prevail between us once more."

## CHAPTER XXVII

*Matthew Continues in His Rôle of Gallant Gentleman*

All that day Matthew wondered if, when friend or acquaintance inquired for Doris or the boy, he would be able to control his manner so that he might inhibit all misgivings which the slightest change in the expression of his facial muscles, or in his eyes, or in his voice in speaking of her must arouse.

While in the depths of this reflection he ran into Stuart at the corner of Cedar and Nassau Streets. He had not seen Stuart for several years, for increasing fame and wealth had sent the man who desired to be an unpopular author to Europe, where he tramped the Alps and Pyrenees and visited the picture galleries and dined and wined at the best hotels. Probably to console himself for his popularity Matthew thought, when reading an interview of some newspaper reporter with the "celebrated American author."

Stuart looked aggressively prosperous and happy and he wrung Matthew's hand with a heartiness which time had not tempered.

"Well," said Stuart, "you needn't ask me how I am, nor need I ask you how you are. That much time is saved. Do you remember how I talked against time the first day we met, Matthew Ferguson?"

Did Matthew remember?

"Tell me all about yourself, old chap," said Matthew heartily.

"Well," began Stuart pensively, but oozing satisfaction at every pore, "I proposed to Alison Beecham last night."

"Good Lord!" Matthew ejaculated. "I hope she didn't accept—I mean—I mean——" he broke off in confusion. Stuart laughed.

"No, she did not accept me," he said. "So do not worry."

"Well, for a rejected lover I must say you look fairly contented."

"Why, you don't suppose I proposed in the expectation of being accepted, do you?" Stuart asked blandly. "Fact is, Matthew, I'm as good as engaged to the dearest, sweetest, truest girl that ever lived."

"Does she approve of your novels?" Matthew inquired wickedly.

Stuart twiddled his thumbs and suddenly broke off.

"She doesn't like me to do that," he explained. "As to my novels—yes and no. She's the sort of girl who reads nothing but the classics, and those she reads only because her father makes her. She's a wonderful girl, Ferguson. She plays golf to perfection and she bakes the best cabinet pudding I ever ate. A remarkable girl, Ferguson."

"And does she do anything else besides play golf, bake cabinet pudding, and read the classics under compulsion?"

"Well," said Stuart, "those are her chief accomplishments. I refer to the golf and the cabinet pudding, of course. As she disapproves of all reading—her disapproval being based solely on a dislike of the tedium of sitting in one place for any length of time—she naturally disapproves of my books."

"But in another way I understood you to say she approves?"

"Exactly, you put it admirably," affirmed Stuart, and relapsed into silence.

"You've aroused my curiosity," said Matthew. "Of

what does she approve? Bindings? Type? Illustrations?"

"You're way off the track," said Stuart, lowering his voice to a confidential pitch. "She approves of the money they bring."

Matthew shouted with laughter.

"My poor friend," he cried, "so you have reached the third ring of the circus! If you marry her you will have to go on being popular."

"Well," said Stuart cheerfully, "I have resigned myself to fate. I am quite content to be popular now. There are compensations in being popular. It's a fine feeling to know that a half million people weep and laugh over every book you put out, and, since I have reached the third ring of the circus, Ferguson, I am a very different man from the solemn ass who thought good writing consisted in boring people and in never moving them to tears or touching their heartstrings."

"Well," cried Matthew, "I am glad to see that the third ring agrees with you thoroughly."

"It's a miracle, my dear fellow, and brought about by the dearest, truest, sweetest girl that ever breathed. She warmed my heart and made me see things in the right light, and besides, as I said before, she approves of the money my books bring."

"A sensible young woman for all her sweetness and dearness," said Matthew dryly.

"I do not want to give you a wrong notion of her," said Stuart conscientiously. "If I said anything just now to make you think her mercenary kindly disabuse yourself of the suspicion. For she is the least mercenary person I know."

"Really?"

"She is really the dearest, sweetest girl that ever was born, but the circumstances in which she passed her life

until the moment I discovered her were such as to make her peculiarly sensitive to the value of popular writing and the royalties thereto accruing."

"You interest me greatly," Matthew assured him.

"You see," said Stuart, busy with his thumbs again, "her father is a professor of conchology. Conchology, you will agree, is a highly respectable subject."

"None more so," Matthew gravely asserted, looking at the cartwheels which Stuart was describing with his thumbs; whereupon Stuart, recollecting the objections which the sweetest, truest girl had to this form of amusement, hastily thrust the offenders into his coat pockets.

"You will also concede," Stuart continued, "that it is not a highly popular subject. It is neither exploited by the Sunday magazines nor, if lectures are given, is it a subject that will draw a full house."

"I cannot challenge your statement," said Matthew.

"So there you are. The professorship of conchology is not a lucrative chair, and it's a very small college. The truth is, my dear fellow, that there is not as much money in it as the average competent stenographer receives, and to eke out the professor took to writing books on conchology, which he believed would bring him fame and, if not bread and butter, then at least bread."

Matthew sighed.

"Well may you sigh," said Stuart, shaking his head somberly. "My poor, dear girl sighs every time she sees the completion of one of these monuments of learning which is to be transmuted into a monument of bread."

"But why does she sigh?" Matthew queried. "Would she prefer seeing it transmuted into pretty clothes?"

Stuart shook his head vigorously.

"She is not a frivolous girl," he said. "She gets one new gown every third year for winter wear and one new summer gown every season. And she has owned but one

silk dress in her life and she inherited that from her great-great-grandmother."

"Isn't it slightly old-fashioned?" Matthew queried.

"The fashion might be a drawback," Stuart admitted, "if she intended wearing it. But she doesn't. It's been a point of honor in that remarkable family to hand the dress on from mother to daughter for several generations, so that, if there is no money to buy a silk dress, the current daughter may at least own one. Fine notion of self-repression, isn't it?"

"Wonderful," said Matthew Ferguson—and he meant it. "Marvelous!"

"Exactly," said Stuart. "Well, her father achieves one of his dreadful conchology books every two years. I use the adjective 'dreadful' not as denoting the impression the book makes upon the reader, for, between you and me, I believe very few readers receive any impression at all from it, as most of them do not read the book, but merely look at the colored plates. I use the adjective 'dreadful' as denoting the effect of these books upon my poor, sweet girl."

"And why do they have a dreadful effect upon her?"

"Well, in confidence, Ferguson, as we agreed before, conchology is not an interesting subject for the average reader. This is not meant as a reflection either upon the reader or upon conchology. It is simply a fact. Well, the professor is forced every time he publishes a book to guarantee to his publisher a sale of five hundred books to help pay the costs of the book, which is published at two and a half dollars. He is not a very good salesman himself and usually ends by giving away copies to such of his friends as show no inclination to buy. Therefore it devolves upon my poor, dear girl to find purchasers for the five hundred books."

"Does she succeed?"

"Oh, yes, she succeeds. She sells about four hundred to the guests of the shore resort hotels near by, most of whom cut out the colored plates, which are wonderfully attractive, and frame them to give away as souvenirs to their friends. You see my poor, dear girl was clever enough to think of this scheme. She had a printer set up 'The Chambered Nautilus' by Holmes, and then she had him run off copies of the poem on fine glazed paper, cut to the exact size of the colored plates, and when the guests at the hotels told her that they were not in the least interested in conchology, she showed them the attractive colored plates—they are really wonderfully attractive—and suggested that each colored plate, framed, and backed by the poem 'The Chambered Nautilus,' also under glass, you understand, would make a more acceptable souvenir from the seashore than the shells and other gimcracks which folks usually buy; and as she was thoughtful enough, furthermore, to have with her a supply of glass of the proper size, together with the necessary *passe partout* binding, she invariably disposed of a goodly number of books at each hotel. Interesting girl, what?"

"Very," said Matthew.

"So that, through the connivance of my poor dear girl the country is flooded with presentments of Littorina Littoralis and Purpura Lapillus and Fissurellas, each purporting to be a Chambered Nautilus. But when we consider that neither the health nor the morals of the community are endangered by the deception, I think my poor dear girl may be safely absolved."

"She certainly may," said Matthew heartily. "Tell me, what becomes of the remaining copies?"

"Well," said Stuart, "she usually manages to sell them to her friends. But I do assure you, Ferguson, that my

poor dear girl has a perfectly horrible time over the remaining one hundred copies."

"Couldn't her friends make use of them in the same way as the hotel guests?"

"Oh, dear, no. You see, they live in a very small town, where everybody knows everybody else, so that, as my door dear girl computed, if everybody she knows bought a copy of the book, and disposed of the colored plates for framing, every person in their set would receive on an average ten colored plates, framed, which, you will admit, would not do at all."

"Certainly not," said Matthew.

"So my poor dear girl had to contrive to sell these one hundred copies in a different way. She succeeded very nicely in disposing of them. Almost all the families to whom she sold a copy have many children, as people who live in the country usually have—and, as most of these good folks keep only one servant, my poor dear girl, in recognition of the one copy, every two years, at two dollars and fifty cents, makes herself useful to such friends as bought a copy by helping them sew for the children, or seeding raisins at Christmas time, or making mince-meat for the Thanksgiving pies. I assure you, my dear Ferguson, that my poor dear girl gave four and five times worth of time and work in return for that one book on conchology at two dollars and fifty cents. She used to weep, she told me—poor child—whenever a new one was finished. You cannot blame her, unfilial as her tears may appear."

"I do not blame her," said Matthew fervently. "Poor child, indeed!"

"So you perceive," said Stuart, "why she is in a position to appreciate particularly books which are popular. One cannot blame her, really, for not wanting to peddle her husband's books as she peddled her father's."

"I do not blame her, heaven knows," said Matthew. "I admit, also, Stuart, that at first I was inclined to think her mercenary. But I have modified my opinion. I think you are marrying a good, brave woman, and I hope your married life will be as happy as you both deserve."

Stuart, fairly exuding satisfaction, twiddled his thumbs with a velocity frightful to behold. Then, recollecting himself, he stopped.

"And now," said Matthew, "appease my curiosity. How could you propose to an Alison Beecham when you are engaged to a sweet, good girl at home?"

Stuart laughed. He hunched his shoulders in vast contentment.

"My dear fellow," he asked, "did you ever observe me in the presence of the lady?"

"I did," said Matthew. "Years ago. And, if you will forgive me for saying so, you seemed greatly smitten."

"Ha," laughed Stuart. "So everybody thought. She treated me abominably, or, rather, her treatment of me would have been abominable if I had been as much in love with her as I pretended to be."

"Stuart," said Matthew, "I never thought of you as a gay Lothario. Out with it all, old man."

"Simply this, Ferguson. I wanted to study her at close range, and I allowed her to think me a silly fool. You may have observed, Matthew, that if anyone thinks anyone else a fool, there is a letting down of the mental and moral drapery in which so many men and women hide their real selves. To the supposed fool this offers an opportunity for a microscopical examination of character. Instead of guesswork, one has certainty; instead of an obscured vision—a clear understanding. Do you comprehend? I examined Alison Beecham microscopi-

cally just as long as was needful. When I was through with her I proposed as a fitting culmination."

"Man alive," cried Matthew, "what would you have done if she had accepted you?"

"Oh, there was no danger of that, none in the least. She wanted me, like every other man who pays her the least attention, to propose to her——"

"That's true," said Matthew under his breath and with bitter recollection.

"But she had no intention of accepting me."

"Still," said Matthew, "it's humiliating to have a woman refuse one."

"You see," said Stuart, meditatively, "my feelings were in a curious jumble. In the first place, in continuing my microscopic studies, or, rather, in bringing them to a conclusion, I was anxious to see just how much heartlessness she could inject into a refusal. In the second place, I really felt that in giving her the satisfaction of refusing me I was making the *amende honorable* for getting such good copy out of her behavior. In the third place——"

"Stuart," Matthew interposed seriously, "I was beginning to hope that you had stopped thinking in ordinals."

"So I have," said Stuart promptly. "In using them just now I was merely backsliding. *She* disapproves of ordinals as well as of thumbs."

Matthew laughed.

"Stuart," he said, "you are the most curious conglomeration of shrewdness and childlike simplicity I have ever met."

"I'm shrewd," said Stuart gravely, "with people who are humbugs. I'm childlike and bland with those who are honest."

"I hope," said Matthew, "to have the pleasure some day of meeting the lady of the conches."

"Undoubtedly you will," said Stuart. "We're to be married next month. Here I am, talking nothing but my own affairs. How is your wife?"

"The wife is well," said Matthew nonchalantly.

"And the young scion of the Ferguson dynasty?"

"The son is well also," said Matthew.

Stuart put out his hand.

"I'll run in some evening to see the only and original Ferguson trio," he said, "if I may."

"You'll come for dinner," said Matthew. There followed an exchange of addresses, and then, shaking hands, they parted.

Matthew, hurrying up Nassau Street, reflected that he had crossed the Rubicon without being aware of it. In acknowledging the boy as his son he was committing himself definitely, more definitely than in promising Doris to wait patiently until she would confess her guilt.

"What," he asked himself, "if she refuses indefinitely to acknowledge it?"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

*Matthew Is Told That Love Minus Faith Is Not Love*

Doubt of any kind is a pitiless taskmaster, but the doubt which chooses as its target one whom we hold dear as life itself is the most remorseless, pernicious of tyrants. A very devil of a fellow he is, replete with grotesque insinuations and bizarre accusations, and the pity of it is that no insinuation is too gross or too ribald, no accusation is too wild, to receive credence. The milk of love has curdled and turned acid and the more deeply we love the person we doubt the more preposterous is the complexion of our mistrust.

Matthew lived through a week that was a nightmare. Doris and he met at the table only, and both tacitly allowed Little Matthew to monopolize the conversation. The civility they showed each other, when speech was unavoidable, was the exaggerated courtesy of strangers who meet for the first time.

Matthew let himself into his apartment with his latchkey one evening, or rather one morning, for it was long past one o'clock when he entered. He came in scowling and angry, for he had sat all afternoon and all evening in Mr. Cravatt's library with the Powers, the meeting being called to consider ways and means of obtaining the much-discussed new extension franchise for operating on Nth Avenue.

For long hours Matthew had bitterly opposed making any attempt to obtain this extension franchise, basing his objection not on humanitarian grounds, but on the technical difficulties involved and the hazard, in case of failure, of having the old franchise under which they operated at that moment revoked by the city lawyers; a proceeding which was not unlikely to occur, as Matthew pointed out, if an attorney, among the personnel of the counsel employed by the City, and honest in his determination to serve the people of the City of New York, should be astute enough to discover a flaw which he himself had found in the old franchise.

The powers had no such misgiving, and Matthew's objection was overruled in the end. He was intensely chagrined, for he had made the plea, not so much in the interest of the powers, but for the ultimate purpose of serving the children of Nth Avenue. His opposition to the new franchise was a compromise with his conscience. If he could not save the children on Nth Avenue along the route of the present tracks of the Interstate railway Company, he would, at least, save the children in the more densely congested districts through which it was proposed to run the new tracks.

As he was not willing to break with the Powers, he had virtually accepted the disagreeable commission of working out a campaign to obtain the new franchise.

He walked noiselessly to the guest chamber which he was occupying since his disagreement with Doris. His coat and collar were flung upon a chair, when there came a rap at the door. Opening it, he faced Doris. She was fully dressed and she came into the room, closed the door behind her with a manner that seemed to proclaim that she belonged there, and sat down upon the bed, as the only available chair was occupied by his coat. Insignificant as this action appeared, Matthew thrilled

in every nerve. Inalienably and unalterably they were one flesh. What concerned one concerned the other. Never again could they be indifferent to each other's weal or woe.

"Little Matthew was taken ill this afternoon," she said.

"Why didn't you 'phone me?"

"I did. I 'phoned to your office, and I called up Mr. Beecham's office and Mr. Cravatt's, but I could not locate you."

He reflected, like a flash, that a less sweet-tempered woman would have said that, since he did not consider the child his own, he could hardly expect her to notify him in the event of the child's being ill.

"I was at Mr. Cravatt's residence all afternoon and evening," he said. "Did you send for a physician?"

"Yes." Her tone conveyed nothing, and he came and sat down beside her.

"Is he very ill, Doris?"

"Dangerously so, Matthew. It is diphtheria, and Doctor Ball thinks that scarlet fever will develop."

"You have a nurse?"

"Yes, he sent a trained nurse immediately, and another one comes to-morrow morning?"

"Don't you think, Doris, that we had better have another physician to consult with Doctor Ball in the morning?"

She looked up quickly, and a pitiful smile flickered over her face. She stretched out her hands appealingly, and he took them in his, as if that were the most natural thing in the world to do.

"Thank you for that 'we,' Matthew."

He pressed her hand and repeated his question. Doris thought they would wait for Doctor Ball to say whether he thought a consultation would be necessary. She

rose from the bed. Little Matthew was awake, and she must return to him.

Matthew asked whether it would excite the child if he came too.

"He has been begging for you for an hour," said Doris; "if you will come it will quiet him."

Matthew arose, and began putting on his collar. His fingers were clumsy with excitement, and though he got the collar in place he could not manage the tie. Doris finally came to his assistance, and his hands fell away and allowed her to complete the task over which he had struggled. He thanked her, and put on his coat.

When he looked up again, a strange change had come over her. Her eyes were burning with a radiance which he could not analyze.

"Matthew," she cried passionately, "do not go to the child's bedside feeling he is not your child! Not on his account—you have never let him guess the horrid suspicion under which you have placed him—but on your own account! If the child were to die you would upbraid yourself cruelly in days to come for—for just this."

"I think not," he said, "you admit that I have not let the child see any difference in my manner. I have, then, nothing with which to reproach myself. My thoughts are my own, nor can I, even if I wished to, banish at will the suspicions of which you speak."

"Look at me, Matthew," she said, earnestly, "look me straight in the eyes—could I meet your gaze unflinchingly as I do—with my child so ill—if I were a guilty woman? Why will you not look at me? Oh, Matthew, it is your eye, not mine, that is wavering."

It cost him a strong effort to look at her. A strange wish came over him to take her in his arms, to hold her to his heart, regardless of what had been, regardless

of guilt or innocence. He mastered the impulse. He told himself that his habit of esteeming her was still well-established. Her guilt, in which he firmly beiieved, was an isolated fact, one barren rock of discord rising from a landscape of harmony and peace.

"Matthew," she was saying, "why will you not answer me? Do you really think it possible that I would lie to you at such a time?"

"I must believe the evidence of my senses," he said doggedly. "I am intensely sorry for you."

"Sorry!" She laughed bitterly. "Sorry! Oh, Matthew! I am sorry for you——"

"Why speak of all this now?" he asked gently. "Let us ignore it, like civilized beings——"

"Ignore it? Just because we are civilized beings we cannot ignore—oh—it is not your outraged sense of the proprietorship that I am poignantly aware of, Matthew—it's the outraged sense of finding that the idol has clay feet—and that, and your dreadful composure, make it so much more bitter for me than mere animal jealousy would have been."

"I have forgiven you, Doris. I can say no more. All I ask is that you acknowledge your guilt."

"To what end? That you take me back? Oh, intolerable!" She flared and flamed with a strange spiritual passion. "If I were guilty," she cried, "I would not expect your forgiveness. I would expect you to spurn me, to strike me, to use me despitefully, to trample me underfoot—to brand me as the most infamous of women."

"Hush," he said.

"Do you think I would accept your forgiveness if I were guilty? I would hate you for being so wretched a specimen of a man as to be able to forgive!"

"Doris," he said, utterly appalled by her fury, "does that mean that you hate me now?"

She laughed derisively.

"I do not hate you," she said, "for I am convinced that in your heart you know that I am innocent. You are obstinately, wilfully blind and self-deluded. You cling stubbornly to a belief which your conscience must tell you is wicked, unholy and sinful."

"Doris, Doris," he interpolated, amazed by the intensity of her anger.

"I can tell you this," she continued, "I have thought of suicide."

He uttered an exclamation of fright.

"Do not alarm yourself," she said calmly, "I did not take my life nor do I intend doing so, for I realize that you love me, and it is beneath me to take such an odious revenge. But how long, I ask you, is this aberration of yours to continue?"

"I have asked myself the same question, with regard to your refusal to admit your guilt," he said coolly. "How long are you going to deny it?"

She derived a poignant satisfaction from contemplating him with eyes in which still glowed that unearthly, unfleshly fire. That look was harrowing to nerves that had been tortured all afternoon and evening as his had been.

"If you are innocent, indeed," he said.

"Ah," she cried, "you admit the possibility? That is something. That is a great deal."

He did not know whether she was speaking ironically or in sincerity. He took up the broken thread of his sentence.

"If you are innocent, why do you offer no explanation as to the resemblance?"

Her anger overflowed, poured itself over him with the smooth ferocity of lava.

"If I had attempted to offer you an explanation, I would have offered you a lie," she said. "Do you think me so unimaginative, so poor in invention that I could not have thought of some explanation with which to satisfy you? You asked me, that dreadful day, whether I had looked much at Lawrence's photograph before Matthew's birth. Was not Vincent a living photograph?"

"You saw him only before we went on our honeymoon," he said.

"Oh," she cried, "it is all so horrible! So horrible! Adultery, to be accused of that, which always seemed to me the lowest plane of degradation to which a woman could fall. If any one had come to me with proof of your guilt I would not have believed any evidence offered, so long as you had denied that guilt, because I have faith in you, knowing that in all your life you have never done a dishonorable or an unkind thing."

He flushed in recollection of the task set him by the powers that very day. If she knew that he had committed himself definitely to that plan, would her belief in his honor vanish?

"Doris," he said very gently, "neither would I have believed your guilt if my own eyes had not furnished the corroboration."

"Do not believe your eyes—believe your heart," she entreated.

"What you ask is impossible," he said.

"Matthew," she implored, almost hysterically, "it is not impossible. Love without faith is not love." He started. Had not Grace Cravatt told him the same thing not long ago? "Probe my conduct, test every action of mine since you have known me, and then ask yourself if

I am capable of such an offense as that with which you charge me."

"Doris," he said, deeply moved, "I can but repeat, I am intensely sorry for you. And, believe me, I love you very dearly."

She closed her eyes and, arms folded across her wildly heaving bosom, she stood before him. Her wonderful beauty was not in the least diminished by her indignation. Pity and love forced him to say: "Doris, the day may come when a full belief in your innocence will come to me. I hope it may."

Without changing her position she opened her eyes.

"You are saying that out of pity," she said, "but I am glad, nevertheless, that you have said it, for, once we have voiced a possibility, that possibility sooner or later will find its way into our heart. Some day you will know, Matthew, with the knowledge born of unshakable faith, that you have done me a horrible injustice."

She dropped her arms, and moved toward the door.

"Come," she said, "let us go to Little Matthew."

## CHAPTER XXIX

*Matthew Realizes That One of the Principal Ingredients of Love Is Faith, and Sees His Faith Gloriously Vindicated*

Little Matthew was very ill indeed. The dreaded scarlet fever developed, and there followed days and nights of torment for Doris, and for Matthew as well. The sacred bond of a common sorrow seemed, for a time, to wipe away the recollection of their division.

Matthew, at the beginning of the second week, insisted on sending for Andrew, who, although he had long since forsaken the practice of medicine for the experimental field of eugenics, was still considered the Hippocrates of juvenile diseases.

Matthew did most of his work at home these days, and, on the morning of Andrew's expected arrival, the automobile had been dispatched for his cousin while he sat in the library, striving desperately to concentrate his mind on the projected extension franchise campaign, which, owing to the anxiety he was living through for his own boy—unconsciously Matthew thought of him in that light now the child was ill—seemed doubly infamous to him. He became aware that the door had opened and that Doris had entered the room.

"Oh, Matthew," she said, with a sob, "I am sure he is going to die!"

"My dear girl," he protested, rising and going to her.

"I feel I can stand no more," she sobbed. "Oh, Matthew, tender-hearted and loving as you are, even you cannot fathom what agony there is for a mother in the thought that she may have to give up her delicate, tender little child, her first-born!"

Words were futile. He took her in his arms. "My dear girl," he said again.

She wept wildly for a few moments. Then she raised her head.

"Oh, Matthew, he is such a tiny thing to take the long journey all alone."

He tried to soothe her. He said the obvious things, feeling they were obvious and horribly trite and commonplace. He assured her Andrew would save the child. All the while he had his arms about her. Her lovely face was drawn out of all semblance of loveliness by her grief, and it came to him, while he held her thus, and saw her thus disheveled and unlovely, that he loved her not one whit the less.

"Whatever she does I must always love her," he thought, and it occurred to him that this certainty of loving her was engendered by the knowledge that she was good.

Episodes, trifling in themselves, sometimes are charged with a subtle, elusive meaning which makes them potent. After Doris had left the room, Matthew, seating himself in his revolving chair, leaned far back and thought rapidly. Doris's assumption that she, the mother, was suffering more than he, the father, with the entirely unconscious and unexpressed emphasis on his fatherhood, seemed in the nature of a revelation.

> *Love without faith is not love. Some day you will know, with a knowledge born of unshakable faith.* . . .

The words had been ringing in his ears incessantly

since she had spoken them. Suddenly a vitalizing spark fell upon the dead embers of his faith in her, and relighted it.

"Of course she is innocent," he cried, "how could I have been so blind? Of course she is innocent."

He remembered now an overwhelming testimony yielded by looks, actions and words, each one of which eloquently attested her utter purity and single-mindedness.

If she had been guilty, every new asseveration of her innocence, every new denial of her guilt, would have added the infamy of a cardinal lie to her sin. As he saw the situation now, such a consistently carried out campaign of lying and evasion was wholly impossible to Doris, whose lofty integrity always had added a peculiar aroma to his spiritual pride in having won her. He recalled numerous instances of her passionate love of truth. He remembered the one lie she had told him—in regard to the money which she paid Vincent Diberto. But he exculpated her on the ground that loyalty to the dead had, in a way, imposed the untruth.

It was all in the viewpoint.

Then, too, had she not once told him—years ago—"Lawrence Diberto always was and always will be to me the beau-ideal of children?" She had forgotten that, or she would have reminded him of it in pleading her innocence.

It was all so simple—so very, very simple!

"Of course she is innocent," he said again, and questioned himself closely as to what miracle had brought about his conversion, for the incident that had worked the miracle was wholly out of proportion to the overwhelming certainty which he now entertained of her innocence. He groped blindly for a comprehension of what seemed to him an almost divine interposition. All

at once he realized that on former occasions Doris had been keenly aware of his unbelief, and her arguments in her own behalf had been heated, angry, rebellious. To-day—forgetful of that difference—she had, as it were, shown him the inmost recesses of her soul. And her utter unconsciousness of self had convinced him.

"Doris!" he called, not realizing that she was not in the room and would not hear him. "Doris!" He was filled with a sweeping desire to tell her of his conversion. A mighty force seemed to throb and pant in him, crying for speedy expression of his rediscovered faith in her. He ran to the door and opened it and was about to run swiftly upstairs, when he saw her coming down.

"Matthew," she said, "Doctor Ball has come. Andrew will be here any moment."

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "Come in here, Doris. I have something to say to you."

He did not question the delicacy of bringing up the subject now. What was delicacy compared to the fierce triumphant joy that filled his soul? He had no right to keep that from her. He wanted to communicate it to her as quickly as possible.

"Doris," he said, speaking quickly, as if the fleetest breath he had ever drawn was too slow a messenger for this message of joy, "Doris, you were right when you said that one day I would know with the knowledge born of an unshakable faith that you are innocent. The day has come."

A beautiful light dawned in her face, and for a moment erased the creases and lines which the sorrow and sleepless nights of the past week had etched there. He opened his arms, and she crept into their sheltering circle.

"How?" she asked.

"I cannot say—how or why—except that some incom-

prehensible chastity in your manner, some subtlety of words or voice—I cannot explain," he concluded lamely.

She clasped her arms about his neck in her sweet, wifely fashion.

"You are not merely saying this—out of pity for me?" she demanded.

"No, no, Doris. I am telling you the truth. And, dear, perhaps you were right also when you said that if my unbelief in you had had a substantial instead of a shallow basis, I would have crushed you, used you cruelly, trampled you underfoot."

"I have been unjust to you," she whispered. "It was so wonderfully noble of you, Matthew, to be willing to forgive even the unforgivable offense. Oh, my husband, it was almost worth living through these weeks of bitterness, to know that you loved me so dearly. I was angry, overcome with the shame of the monstrous charge you made against me, when I said I would hate you for that! If it were possible for me to love you more, Matthew, than I have loved you all these years, your charity for my imagined offense would have made me love you more. But for years you have had all my love and we cannot give more than all."

She sat down and began to weep softly.

"Hush, Doris," said Matthew. "Here is Andrew now. The auto is at the door." And he went out into the hall to greet his cousin.

Andrew was practically unchanged. From his manner of greeting his cousin and his cousin's wife, a casual onlooker would have fancied that they had parted the evening before, when, in reality, five years had elapsed since he had seen either Doris or Matthew.

"Crying?" he asked of Doris. "Well, tears will do no good. Husband your strength, that is wiser," and he demanded to be taken immediately to the little patient.

On his way to Little Matthew's bedside he informed the child's parents that he was prepared to remain with them until the crisis was over. Amanda had been clamoring for a visit to New York, and was to arrive next day. He grumbled at the foolishness of women, for Amanda had refused to lock up her house without those preliminary dustings and inventory takings which a conscientious housekeeper deems essential before leaving her little kingdom even for a week. Andrew, therefore, had been compelled to make the trip to New York alone.

Matthew waited at his son's door until the consultation was over. Andrew came out of the sick-room alone, and the two cousins walked silently down the stairs and into the library.

"Well," said Andrew, after convincing himself that the door was closed, "he is a very sick child, as I need not tell you. But he will pull through unless a third sickness develops."

"Any symptoms?"

"He may be developing pleurisy. Doctor Ball fears this. He has done all he or any man can do. But it was well to send for me, for no physician likes to bear alone the responsibility for the life of an heir-apparent."

Matthew ignored his cousin's dry pleasantry.

"I am making a few changes in diet and medicine, of which Doctor Ball approves. After that we must be content to wait. Matthew!"

Andrew ejaculated his cousin's name with such vigor that Matthew asked as explosively:

"What?"

He regretted to see that Andrew was showing the first signs of old age, for the abrupt, odd, kind-hearted little man came forward, and placed both his hands on Matthew's shoulders with the pompous affection of which old age alone is not ashamed to make an outward show.

"I am glad to see that you are true blue," Andrew said—"that you have taken the resemblance of your little boy to your wife's first husband like a man. I am heartily glad to see it makes no difference."

Matthew felt his heart in his throat.

"The resemblance is very marked, is it not?" he contrived to ask.

"Extremely so," said Andrew. "It was the very thing I feared, and it was my reason for opposing your marriage. At any rate, my boy, you might have let me know about this resemblance. You might have known, that, as an eugenist, I would be intensely interested."

Matthew's self-control was in danger of breaking.

"Do you know of similar cases?" he asked.

"Medical records are full of them," said Andrew. "Personally before yours only one case has come to my knowledge. In this case a woman was involved who had had a lover. She had confessed her guilt to the man she married before accepting him, and he had condoned the offense. When, however, their child was born and resembled the erstwhile lover, he refused to believe that his wife was innocent. Fortunately she came to me to disburden herself, and my opinion carried sufficient weight with her husband to exonerate the unfortunate lady.

"Now, Matthew, if that rascally twin brother of Lawrence Diberto's were alive instead of dead, and had happened to be about, even your poor wife might have fallen under a cloud. Fine story that for a sensational play, what?"

"What is the cause—I mean, how can such things happen?"

"Purely psychic, according to some authorities," said Andrew, becoming visibly agitated, as he launched into one of his favorite topics. "The idea is, of course, that

the first husband has left such an indelible stamp upon his wife's mind that she passes this image on to her child. The women of old Greece, you will remember, surrounded themselves with beautiful statues of men and women and children, and produced a physically perfect race. You may remember that I did some experimenting with Andalusian fowl?"

"I do," said Matthew. Was Andrew going to drag in some irrelevant subject? He sighed.

"Well, Andalusian fowl are a remarkable species in that they cannot be made to breed true. What I mean by this is that Andalusian fowl come in three varieties, white, black and the true Andalusian fowl which have plumage of a peculiar metallic, opalescent blue. Now, mating white to white, and black to black, and Andalusian to Andalusian, they should, after several generation, be made to breed true, that is, to produce birds that are all white, all black, and all Andalusian. But apparently it is impossible to produce a pure strain." Andrew rubbed his nose vigorously, and dropped his head to one side. His excitement became greater. "Now it is a well-known fact among poultry breeders that a hen of one species that has been mated to a cockerel of another species will never again breed true. So we have conclusive proof that the Andalusian fowl is a hybrid and not a pure species."

Matthew moved uneasily in his chair. He began to see the drift of his cousin's "irrelevance."

"You must always remember, Matthew," Andrew continued, "that scientists are not able to experiment with human beings, and are therefore forced to content themselves with experimenting with guinea-pigs, horses, dogs —and Andalusian fowl. We draw certain conclusions from these experiments, which, with very few exceptions, are applicable to human beings."

"Of course, as a layman, I am not entitled to an opinion," said Matthew, "but it seems to me that all you have been saying shows that merely physiological forces are at work in producing—Andalusian fowl in the three colors."

The little doctor became profoundly agitated. So intensely excited was he that he could hardly talk.

"So it seems at first glance," he said, "but, before formulating a physiological theory, science has to dispose of certain other obtrusive facts. It is generally conceded by those who deal with psychology on a scientific basis that the subconscious mind is the true psychic, and this subconscious mind is released from the fetters in which it is held by the objective mind through hypnotism. Therefore, if we can eliminate the possibility of hypnotizing fowl, we may be safe in assuming a physiological and not a psychological origin for the singular fact at issue."

"You do not mean to tell me that animals can be hypnotized?"

"Indeed, I do," exclaimed Andrew. "An insect, the *carausus morosus*, which looks exactly like a part of a twig or a branch of the shrub or tree it lives upon, falls very easily into the cataleptic state, and chickens—all fowl, in fact, are notoriously easy to hypnotize."

"You interest me exceedingly."

"There is nothing more to tell. Eugenics is forced to suspend its ultimate judgment until psychology can supply us with new data. And there we are."

"Amazing," exclaimed Matthew.

Andrew went to the door.

"Doctor Ball," he said, "come in."

Matthew touched his cousin on the arm, and said swiftly, "not a word of this to Doris!"

"Ah—sensitive about it?" Andrew chuckled. "I see.

Come in, Doctor Ball, come in. I want a further talk with you about the young heir-apparent."

Doctor Ball smiled sheepishly, and came in. He was a heavy, red-faced, slow-moving man, and the reverent manner with which he deferred to Andrew's judgment, and listened to what was said by Andrew, and endorsed every opinion uttered by Andrew, who was so slight, and inconspicuous and insignificant looking, amused Matthew immensely.

But beyond a vague amusement which he extracted from the learned discourse of the two medical men, debating on ways and means to save the life of the small child who lay ill, Matthew was not cognizant of anything that passed.

A tumultuous joy thrilled him. Science offered, if not an explanation, then at least a concrete reinforcement of his reawakened faith in his wife. Forgotten for the moment was that wife's anxiety, forgotten the danger from which his child was by no means delivered. He could have proclaimed his story from the housetops—such a fury of joy possessed him. The finest flower of that joy, its purest essence, its very soul was the circumstance that faith had preceded knowledge, that love, consecrated by faith, had believed the seemingly impossible, because love contented itself with love and with faith, and had refused to traffic any longer with doubt and unbelief.

And again Doris's words—the same words with which Grace Cravatt had exhorted him—rang through his mind, rang sweetly and purely as any Christmas chimes:

*Love without faith is not love!*

## CHAPTER XXX

*Mr. Ferguson Has an Interesting Interview with a Lady Whom, in the Swift Current of His Life, He Had All but Forgotten*

The gallant fight Little Matthew was making for his life was faithfully recorded by the temperature chart, which told how the fever climbed and climbed until it burned at the topmost notch it can reach without destroying the tenement it inhabits. It told how the fever dropped suddenly and then climbed up again; dropped once more only to essay another wild flight; then finally dropped and stayed down, making only ineffectual efforts to mount once more, which were recorded by little baby mountains alongside the Himalayas of yesterday.

Andrew, about a week after his arrival, entered the library, where Matthew was at work on his franchise scheme.

"Well," he said, "a week ago the chances were ninety-nine to a hundred against the boy. To-day they are with him—ninety-nine against one."

Matthew laid down his pencil, tilted his chair back, and crossed his hands behind his head.

"Why not say, then, that he is out of danger?"

"By the same token, there would have been no hope a week ago. Yet we have won out, unless——"

"Unless——?"

"Unless his heart gives out."

Matthew brought his feet down to the floor abruptly.

"You've told me nothing of that before," he said.

"Well, the touch of pleurisy has weakened the heart. No physician is omniscient. I consider Little Matthew well out of danger; I consider him so safe that to-morrow morning I am going home. Still, there is the hundredth chance."

He came and put his hand on his cousin's shoulder.

"Rest easy, my lad," he said affectionately, "to all intents your little son is safe."

Andrew left him. And now something in Matthew rebelled against putting the finishing touches to his clever draft of a scheme calculated to throw sand in the public eye in regard to the new franchise. It was as clever and as wicked a scheme as has ever been devised in a city notorious for infamies. The time-honored instinct of the race was alive in him, crying lustily that in return for his child's life he must offer some sacrifice, and the modern instinct of humanitarianism whispered that that sacrifice must consist in dealing honestly and fearlessly with his fellow-creatures, more particularly in protecting the helpless and the weak.

Beads of cold perspiration stood on his brow. Again and again he sought to add the final sentence to the rough draft which he purposed to read aloud within the hour before the Assembled Powers at Mr. Cravatt's mansion. But now his brain would not formulate the words, and his hand would not set them on paper.

Intensely nervous, he arose and, although the January day was sharp and cold, he opened the window and inhaled the outdoor air.

"It does not matter," he told himself, "it is all stored in my brain, anyhow."

The telephone rang, and closing the window he took

up the receiver and became aware of a very excited Tommy at the other end.

"Another child killed this morning," said Tommy.

"The devil," snapped Matthew.

"O'Reilly, or Murphy, or Gallagher, oh, I don't know, Chief, some Irish name. It's a boy of twelve this time."

"That's bad," said Matthew. Experience had taught him that the older the child the nearer did the accident approximate murder in the opinion of the public at large; the killing of younger children, children below three or four, was reckoned as a species of infanticide, which, though deplorable, caused a mere ripple of excitement as compared with the waves of agitation caused by an older child's death.

"Mother's been down here, Chief, and she's on her way to your house. Wouldn't believe you were not in. We had to show her your office, we couldn't get rid of her. Why, Chief, she was so persistent she accused us of hiding you in the hat and coat closet."

Matthew laughed.

"Did you open that for her inspection, too?"

"Oh, she inspected all right. A great big Brobdingnagian woman she was, and she pushed us aside like so many paper dolls. Really, Chief, don't think us a lot of feeble-minded deficients, but we simply could not stop her. After she had convinced herself that you were not in the coat room, she discovered the hole which has been cut for the new ventilator connecting your room with the outer office. Then she vowed and declared, in the most unchristian brogue that ever offended mortal ears, that that was a private passageway through which you beat your retreat when ladies like herself called. Well, Chief, as you know, that hole is not big enough to afford the passage of an office boy, of the baseball-playing size, and this invading female was of Brobdingna-

gian girth. Before we could stop her she informed us that she would pull you back by your hair or your shoes or the scruff of your neck, and rolled herself, head foremost, into the hole. As I have said, sir, her dimensions were anything but Lilliputian, so that she stuck fast, and began to bellow—like the bull of Bashan—that this trap was an invention of the devil to murder folks who had a just cause against our master. The sight she presented as she stuck there, sir, beggars description. Her legs—I hope you will not think that I dwell upon that delicate part of her anatomy from any love for the subject—but her legs were almost as big round as the columns of the old Equitable Building, and the sight was—well you can imagine it. And then, Chief, among the cheers and hurrahs of the entire office force, Hancock and I contrived to get her out."

"How?" asked Matthew, weak from laughter.

"Why, Chief, we simply hung on for dear life."

"What happened then?"

"We expected, of course, to be abused for our pains. But the parlous situation in which she had found herself had improved her temper. She thanked us very civilly for rescuing her, and departed quietly, merely saying that she would see you at your residence. Now Chief, you take my advice and do not see her, though she is perfectly right in saying that it smells to heaven that a man like yourself, with your record, should debase himself and the profession he represents by defending that ungodly franchise which by rights should have been revoked over a decade ago."

"Scold ahead, my boy," said Matthew, affably. "Going to chuck me, at last?"

"Not on your tin-type, Chief," Tommy sang back blithely. "You cannot get rid of me. I am your con-

science. All the rest of your staff are a lot of sniveling, groveling parasites. *I* tell you the truth."

"You certainly do, Tommy."

"And some day, Chief, you are going to quit that game of graft and inhumanity and go back to——"

"To what, Tommy?"

"One cannot transmit the principal words of love by telephone, Chief. Supply the missing words yourself."

Matthew flushed. He was stung at last.

"Don't see this woman from Brobdingnag, Chief," Tommy continued. "She is desperate, and I do not believe she would stick at murder."

"Well, Tommy," said Matthew, "you are a good boy, even if you do scold me unmercifully."

He hung up the receiver, and walked back to the desk whereon lay the plan he had been weeks in evolving. It was finished save for a final sheet or two. Tommy's words had unloosed again the race-instinct, crying clamorously that he must show gratitude in return for clemency shown himself. But he pushed aside the gentler emotions that were striving for mastery.

"I cannot give it to them unfinished, and I am in no mood to complete it. I'll speak to them instead, and send them copies of the document to-morrow. Williams!"

Williams entered with silent swiftness.

"Williams," said Matthew, locking the document away, "if a woman with an Irish name asks for me, say I'm not in."

"If you please, sir, she was at the door a few minutes ago, and seeing, sir, that she is the sort of person we've turned away before, when the usual accidents occur, I took the liberty of saying that you were out without first inquiring, sir, for that sort of person always has

the impudence to doubt one's words if one makes inquiries before answering."

"Very good, Williams." Matthew was secretly annoyed, although on former occasions he had commended the man's initiative. "The usual accidents!" Even his servants knew and judged him; for Matthew was too shrewd to mistake servility for sincerity. "Did she go away, Williams?"

"Only as far as the lobby, sir. The elevator man just came in to tell me she has taken possession of the waiting-room in the lobby and is accosting every gentleman who passes, demanding to know if he is *the* Mr. Ferguson."

"Confound her impudence."

"Yes, sir," said Williams.

"Williams, I am going to Mr. Cravatt's. On my way out I will speak to this person."

Williams's phrase "has taken possession of the waiting-room" was well chosen. The woman whom Tommy had described had seated herself on the small sofa, which she filled to repletion, although ordinarily two persons occupied it comfortably with space to spare. She was a broad, raw-boned woman, cast in a mold large rather than stout, and—where had he seen her before?

"Faith," she said, "yer the last person I iver expecthed to mate again." Then Matthew knew. She was the Amazon whom he had met in Andrew's waiting-room, ten years ago, at the beginning of his career. It flashed upon him then that the boy of twelve who had been killed was the infinitesimal offspring she had had with her that day. Unaccountably he felt a sudden pain in the region of the heart as if stabbed by a rapier.

"D'ye remimber me? Sure, and if he doesn't go about dishtributing so much money and kindness that he forgot the two dollars he gave me tin years ago!"

"I remember you perfectly," said Matthew.

"It's wishing I am that some other folks would have the kind hearrt that you have," she continued. "Though ye did pretind ye acted so fine by me because my talkin' annoyed ye. Och, such trouble as I've had since then. Such a time I've had a-raisin' of me boy, him thet ye saw thet day, and now he'd gotten so thet he'd be a comfort to me in me old age he lies dead. Run over by hell's train."

Matthew stood in silence. It was not unusual for the mothers and fathers of the children who were killed to seek a personal interview with him. Usually the faithful if disapproving Tommy acted as a buffer. If he did not succeed in deflecting them, the denizens of the tenements were invariably overawed by the resplendent presence of the great Matthew Ferguson, for he dressed more carefully than ever and had taken on just enough flesh to give the final touch of dignity to his fine personality. This woman, however, was not in the least awed by him, nor would she be awed when she learned his name. He perceived that an unpleasant half hour was awaiting him.

"Do ye live here?" Mrs. Ryan inquired.

"I do," said Matthew Ferguson.

"Well," said Mrs. Ryan, "there's sothin' in the scriptures about one man not being worrthy to loosen the latchet of another's shoe. There's one man under the same roof with ye—may the seven plagues of Egypt trouble the carrion—who ain't fit for to breathe the same air with yesself. A hypocrite and a liar he is. Pretendin' and pretendin' to be the friend and protector of the poor, and when the first lot of highway burrglars in high places came along and offered him a job he forgot all about the poor and his amazin' love for them, and began to hobnob with them as have got the purchase price for his conscience. A crafty devil he is; God-a-mercy!

If it weren't for him hell's train would have been stopped long ago by the community. Ah, I read the papers, I do, and I know what I know. It's that devil's cleverness that makes it possible for all those little childer to be murdered year in, year out. I'm spakin' of that arch-fiend Matthew Ferguson."

"I am Matthew Ferguson," said Matthew quietly.

"Sure ye're not *the* Mr. Ferguson?"

"The same."

The woman rose and pointed her forefinger at him.

"Look at the hypocrite and the liar!" she shouted. "Faith, I would not have belayved it. Yerself—yerself—as handed me two dollars and made a joke of it in the bargain, sayin' it was for selfish raysons!" She stopped abruptly. Her shrewd, keen face lighted up with sudden understanding.

"Och," burst from her lips, "wuz it the truth yer was spaking that day, and not a joke at all, as I thought, for to save me embarrassment in acceptin' of yer gift? Faith, thet's what it was. Yer whole life ye've pretended; ye've never cared for the poor, drat your black heart, ye've just pretended to. Selfish ye were, and selfish ye are, and selfish ye ever will be, drat ye again! I came here, maynin' to appeal to yer better instincts, hopin' to soften yer, now thet yer own little lad lies at death's door—but all the while I thought of Mr. Ferguson as just bein' the ordinary bad man, whose love of money had got the best of his hearrt for the time baying!

"I meant to say to him, 'D'ye know what it means to live on Death Avenue?' Ivry morning when the childer goes to school the mothers say, 'Which one is going to be brought home dead to-day! Mine or yours?' And if they don't find time to say it just like thet, they think it and fear all day till the childer are home again. But yerself—drat yer agin—ye're not merely a liar and a

murderer, ye're a hypocrite as well, and there ain't anything one can do to a hypocrite to wash him clayn. A' dirty rag of a man ye are, carrion ye are, for all yer fine linen and good clothes—a dirty rag of a man!"

Matthew answered not a word. Once he lifted his eyes and encountered the woman's angry glance, but he made no effort to dam the torrent of abuse which she was pouring over him.

"Perhaps ye're thinking," she resumed, "because we cannot dress our children fine, and rush specialists down to New York or away from New York, on extra trains, or have nuss-gells in uniform a-taking care of them, that we do not love them! Drat ye agin' for a-thinkin' thet. Under the skin we womin are all alike, and there's many a poor woman, lookin' so shabby and mean thet ye fine folks wouldn't touch her with a ten foot pole, who has a warmer and kinder mother-hearrt abaytin' in her poorly-fed, poorly-dressed body, than my lady who dresses in silks and satins.

"Not that I mayn that for yer wife, for if ever the Lord made a good woman it's she, as I've heard from a dozen poor famblies as she has helped liberally. God pity her, I say, for havin' tied herself to a wretch, and God pity you, I say, the day she finds yer out, for I'm expectin' ye've got some faylin' for her, though 'tis true, the low carrion ye' are, ye may have married her for her money."

Matthew flushed a dull brick red.

"Cut that out," he said shortly. "Whatever men and women think and say of my public career, there's not a breath against my private character or my private life."

"Hear the hypocrite!" said Mrs. Ryan. "Who's ter belayve yer? What yer say about your private life may be so, and again it may not be so. And I'm after thinkin', I am, if yer private character is respectable, as yer say

it is, how, bayin' a clayn, white thing, can it bear to keep close company with such a sooty, grimy crayture as your public character?"

She emitted the long-drawn, sonorous laugh which Matthew had not forgotten. Then, after that lapse from solemnity, her indignation seemed to gather new fury.

"Och," she said, "death coomes to all, and when it coomes natooral I'm the last crayture in the world to oppose meself against the will of the Almighty. But yer hell-trains—yer hell-trains—will ye have the hardihood to offer me money for the life ye stole from me, ye pack of cut-throats? I'll take it, and square and fair I tell yer what I'll do with it! T'is no monumint I'll erect like the monumint ye got the poor Jews to erect who lost their daughters and wives in the fire, with yer name and ugly decayin' mug blazoned in big letters on a medallion—drat ye agin for a dirty hypocrite! Nary a bit of that, me lad. It's spayches I'll make in all parts of the city, showin' ye up—ye varmint—and yer own money will be payin' for the halls I'm thinkin' of hiring!"

"If you do that," said Matthew, "you will surely be arrested."

"We'll see about thet, Mr. Ferguson! As to the two dollars ye gave me full ten years ago, I'm thinkin' it's money that doubles its value in ten years if put out at interest!"

To Matthew's amazement, she lifted her skirt and plunged her hand into her stocking, extracting from it a mangy-looking, attenuated pocketbook. It was done so quickly and so adroitly that she had hurled four very dirty, creased one-dollar bills upon the small table on which he was lightly resting his finger-tips before he realized what was happening.

"Take yer money and the interest on it," she sneered.

"T'is not to the likes of yerself that I'd be beholden for a crust, ye unspaykable knave."

With the majestic bearing of a queen she sailed from the room, leaving him staring after her blankly, too angry for words at this crowning token of her contempt.

Mr. Ferguson, regaining his composure, flicked the dirty bills daintily from the satin wood table and, summoning his automobile, set forth for Mr. Cravatt's mansion, there to perpetrate the enormity which was to be the supreme achievement of the system.

## CHAPTER XXXI

*Mr. Ferguson Gives Himself the Surprise of His Life*

They were all assembled and waiting for him when Matthew arrived at Mr. Cravatt's mansion a quarter of an hour later. Judge Witherspoon and Mr. Cravatt asked him after Little Matthew's condition, but little Beecham, hopping nervously up and down, was too engrossed otherwise to pay attention to Matthew's presence.

"Whatever possessed you, Cravatt, to put a clock without a case in this room?" he cried excitedly. "Positively, it makes me sea-sick to see the pendulum swing to and fro. Monstrous bad taste I call it."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Cravatt, with his usual gravity. "The clock is a great curiosity. It is of Dutch make, and was shipped to England early in the eighteenth century to one of my forbears. It was customary in those days to ship clocks without cases, as the transportation came high. For some reason it was never mounted, thus becoming a 'Wag-on-the-Wall,' as——"

"Well, I do not like your 'Wag-on-the-Wall,'" snapped little Beecham. "It makes me sea-sick——"

"Turn your back to it," said Furlow, "and forget it."

"How can I?" snapped Beecham. "If I turn my back on it I have to face the window, and I cannot face the light because my eyes——"

"Beecham, you're a terrible f. o. m.," said Furlow. "Take it from me."

"And I don't like the way it bangs out the hours," cried Beecham.

"Oh, come off the perch," suggested Furlow. "It's just struck eleven, and it won't strike for another hour. So there——"

"The anticipation of hearing it bing-bang twelve is enough to drive me off my head," declared Beecham.

"Oh, come," said Furlow, "we cannot be driven off what we're off already. Ferguson, have a see-gah!" And he winked facetiously at Ferguson, as he indulged himself in the reprehensible pronunciation. Beecham began to puff and snort with rage, and Mr. Cravatt spoke quickly.

"Mr. Ferguson, have you prepared the draft?"

"Not quite. You will each have a copy of it to-morrow morning. I wished to speak of the plan to-day in person."

Mr. Cravatt bowed his head.

"I consider it my duty," Matthew continued, "once more to call your attention to the risk we incur of having the flaw in the old franchise discovered, in the event of our inviting the attention of first-class counsel to our demands for the extension franchise."

"That danger is practically non-existent, Matthew," Judge Witherspoon said. "I do not wish to flatter you, but I repeat what I said on a former occasion. There is not a lawyer in New York but you who would have found that particular flaw. And, as we who are here are confederates, there is no fear of leakage and no fear of discovery."

There was a peculiar undercurrent in the Judge's voice which challenged Matthew's attention. He did not comprehend its meaning. The Judge, of whom Matthew was sincerely fond, had retired from public life two years before, owing to the ravages of Bright's disease. Mat-

thew saw him often, but, in spite of the friendship that existed between the old and the young man, the Judge observed in certain matters a curious reticence which baffled Matthew. Matthew suspected the Judge of being in straitened circumstances, for his holdings of railroad stock were not large, and he had for years attended the meetings of the Powers in the rôle of semi-official adviser; but whenever Matthew approached him on the matter of the new franchise, he had showed a marked disinclination for voicing his opinions.

"Then," said Matthew, "I have only one remark to make before I submit my plan. Another boy, aged twelve, by the name of Ryan, was killed early this morning."

"Very regrettable, very lamentable," said Mr. Cravatt, sucking luxuriously at one of his fifty-cent Havana cigars.

"Thought it about time for one of Ferguson's attacks of consciencitis," remarked Furlow calmly. "Get it once a year, don't you, like others get the rheumatics or grippe."

"I merely stated a fact," Matthew defended himself.

Judge Witherspoon cleared his throat.

"Mr. Cravatt," he said, "our record this year, since we began running on short headway, is ghastly. We have killed three children a month; some months we have killed four; I wish to say this——"

"What's the use of palavering, Judge?" demanded Furlow. "Wasn't it you talked sense to Ferguson some years ago?"

"I did," said Judge Witherspoon, "and I did it in good faith. I did it because I believed that Mr. Cravatt meant what he said, to wit, that every safeguard known to human ingenuity would be applied to save the children."

"I have done what I have promised," said Mr. Cravatt coldly.

"Certainly you have," said little Beecham. Matthew intercepted a look that passed between the two railroad presidents. It said plainly as words, "Let the poor old chap talk; he has one foot in the grave anyhow, so his opinion is worthless." They believed Matthew Ferguson to be quite "safe" now, did those two admirable men, so what did they care what a back number like the Judge thought? Now his usefulness to them was over, he was only tolerated in their midst because of his family ties.

Every drop of blood in Matthew's veins rebelled against the thinly veiled, wanton disrespect which the two railroad magnates were showing his old friend, to whom, in the heyday of his power and fame, they all had toadied. With a show of utmost deference, a deference which Matthew Ferguson condescended to show few men now that he was at the zenith of his power, he turned and listened to what the Judge was saying.

"At that time, gentlemen, I made my plea in behalf of the small stockholder, and I repeat, it was a sincere plea, for none knew better than I what suffering would be entailed upon hundreds of families if the Interstate were unable to pay dividends. Moreover, it was not a selfish plea, for in those days, while not wealthy, I was prosperous, and I made the serious mistake of believing that poverty must be the most cruel of conditions for the educated man and woman. Since then ill-health and reverses have placed me in the ranks of those whom I formerly commiserated. You are aware that I was forced to sell a large share of my railroad holdings in order to obtain ready cash, and your courtesy alone now entitles me to a hearing. I say this, gentlemen: If, in order to avoid future fatalities, it should become necessary to

make expensive alterations in the existing road, such as building an elevated structure, for instance, I would gladly, at inconvenience to myself, forego the dividends on my common stock for a year or two; and I have found human nature is so fine, gentlemen, that the numerous comparatively poor stockholders of whom I have cognizance, and with whom I have corresponded on the subject, concur with me in saying that they would rather dispense with their dividends than connive in a series of accidents which occur with such unfailing regularity as to place those who make no serious efforts to rectify the conditions under which they occur in the category of cold-blooded murderers."

Again Matthew saw the two railroad men exchange significant glances.

"There was a time when, vaingloriously, I was fond of quoting the poet who said that absolute truth was only for the Deity, not for Man," the Judge continued. "I see now that my application was a perversion of the real significance of that remarkable dictum, the import of which is not that we can serve humanity by bandying about half-truths, but that we, whose vision is limited, whose understanding is finite, must always see the truth as through a veil or mist, so that, when in exceptional cases we see the truth clearly and unobscured, it behooves us to cleave to it with all our might, with all our strength and with all our souls."

There was something superb in the old man's public avowal of former wrong thinking. The moment was dynamic. In spirit Matthew bowed himself humbly before his older friend.

"Furthermore, gentlemen," the Judge resumed, "I say to you that if the present conditions continue it is solely the rich stockholder—yourselves—at whose door the blame must be laid. I can only regret that I have seen

the truth too late, for I am old and sick and professional honor, moreover, forces me to observe silence concerning the technical flaw Mr. Ferguson discovered in the old franchise."

"As you suggest, Judge Witherspoon," Mr. Cravatt said coldly, "the rich stockholders—ourselves—are in control. Mr. Ferguson, we will hear you!"

But Matthew sat silent and taciturn and unheeding. Judge Witherspoon, whom he venerated so greatly, had challenged him to do what was right. Doris had entreated him to do what was right; Mrs. Ryan had spurned him because she believed him incapable of doing right. The Judge had summed up admirably, and set forth concisely the thoughts which he had been ineffectually struggling to slay! And what did this money-grubbing amount to after all! The real matters of moment in life were—well, life itself, honorable and honest life—and his little boy was safe—his and Doris's child—*his* child——!

He rose to his feet.

"Mr. Cravatt! Gentlemen! I am going to disappoint you. I am not going to place at your command an instrument which will virtually deliver into your hands the entire length of Nth Avenue in which to continue the dangerous practice of running surface trains. I——"

Matthew stopped abruptly. The "Wag-on-the-Wall" was striking twelve, and its voice raised so hideous a clamor that no human being could cry it down.

The clock clanged out its last beat, and Matthew resumed. No one tried to stop him. They were all paralyzed with astonishment at this sudden change of front.

"Not only do I refuse to place in your hands this document—a dangerous engine in the hands of dangerous men—but I warn you solemnly that, unless you make provision for alterations on Nth Avenue, such as an elevated

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structure, for instance, which will be an absolute safeguard for life, I will call public attention to the flaw in the existing franchise, and conduct the fight against you!"

"Outrageous! Monstrous! Perfidy!" Good manners were forgotten in the fury his words unloosed. Even Mr. Cravatt forgot to be suave and dignified. They drove at him angrily, and their wild energy seemed to make a mob of the three men. Above their furious voices rang Judge Witherspoon's sonorous tones: "My lad, I am proud of you."

"I have nothing more to say," Matthew hurled back at his assailants. He made his way out of the room. In the hall he waited for a moment, meaning to carry the Judge away with him. But, listening, he heard the tumult subside in the room he had just left. The Judge's authoritative voice was in the ascendant. It spoke with impassioned pleading. He smiled grimly. They were listening attentively now to the broken-down old man!

Matthew ran down the steps. Great news this for Doris! He cared not at all whether the Powers would retain him and make the needed alterations, or whether they would let them go and allow him to fight them! Not one jot or tittle did he care.

"Home," he sang out to the chauffeur, "and as quickly as you can make it," and when he reached his home, he flung hastily past Williams, who opened the door for him. Andrew was pacing up and down the private hall.

"Where's Doris?" Matthew sang out joyously. "Is she——" He came to a dead stop. There was a solemnity of demeanor in Andrew's manner which there was no mistaking.

"Little Matthew——?" Matthew asked desperately, realizing, as he spoke, that he was only fencing for a moment's merciful suspense before the awful truth must be confirmed.

"Not—Not——?" he stammered.

"It was the hundredth chance——" said Andrew gently. "The little life flickered out in a flash; apparently he was quite well, and while Doris and the nurse had turned to lift a table, he passed away."

Matthew did not speak a word. He walked up the stairs heavily, and went to his child's room. Andrew kept beside him.

The little lad was lying on one side, as if asleep. The right hand was extended upon the counterpane, and the left hand of Matthew's curiously fathered little son was cupped to hold his chin in the attitude which had been Lawrence Diberto's.

Matthew smiled through his tears. To himself he said, "Thank God, there is no doubt in my heart now. Thank God!" To Andrew, he said: "When?"

"At noon," said Andrew. "Exactly at noon. The hall-clock was striking the hour."

Matthew started. He stood very erect and quiet. Was this a coincidence? Was it mere chance, or was there a deeper design in it all than the finite mind could fathom?

Wonder, gratitude, awe and sorrow strove in his soul for mastery. He asked himself, "What if I had committed the abomination, instead of repudiating it, at the moment of my boy's death?"

He did not feel indignation, resentment or rancor because his sacrifice had met with this return. That thought, to his glory be it said, did not occur to him. He was purged so that even the sorrow for his child's death was as nothing compared to the shame he would have felt if at that supreme moment he had been the chief agent of an unworthy action.

And then Matthew Ferguson did what he had not done in years. He knelt down and prayed.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### *Matthew Ferguson Tastes the Bitter-Sweet of the New Optimism*

On the morning of the day on which Little Matthew was to be laid away, Matthew was up and dressed before five o'clock. Sitting beside the small casket, in which the child, looking like a beautiful doll, slept his eternal sleep, he watched dawn creeping stealthily in through the shutters. There came a recollection of the days when as a baby Little Matthew had tried to catch the shifting sun-beams. Rising, Matthew opened the shutters. The cool, white light of early morning streamed into the room and across the dead child's face.

Doris came into the room and stood beside him. She put out her hand, and spreading her fingers, allowed the rays of light to filter through them. Husband and wife looked at each other with the smile that is sadder than tears.

"Matthew," she said, "before they take him away there is something I wish to say to you. I have been terribly punished for looking backward, instead of living in the present, and of my own accord I am promising you that henceforth I will be brave and resolute, facing the present only."

She did not weep, but, as his arm lay against her shoulder, he felt her quiver with emotion.

"Doris," he begged, "why repress yourself like this?"

She shook her head.

"I have cried until I have no more tears to give," she said. "My baby's death is the last act of retributive justice."

"Hush," he said gently. He had repeated to her all Andrew had said to him regarding the curious resemblance, and he wondered that she should refer to it now.

"I blame myself for many things, Matthew. Guiltless in one sense of the word, I am afraid I have been disloyal in other ways. There have been times during the first years of our married life, when, much as I loved you, I compared certain traits of yours with certain qualities of Lawrence's to your disadvantage. It seems a bagatelle, but I must say it. You seemed to care so little for music, literature and the fine arts, and he had cared so much. It was very stupid and ungrateful of me, Matthew, to think of inconsequential things of that sort—but the truth must be told."

"It is absurd to blame yourself for that," Matthew said bravely, determined that she should not suspect that her confession caused him even a momentary pang. "All reasonable beings compare one character with another, sometimes in favor of one, sometimes in favor of the other."

"Do you really think that?"

"I do."

"And—did you sometimes think that I was not quite perfect?"

"Yes," he said, thinking of those far-off days when her playfulness, savoring of levity, had driven him to desperation.

"Did you compare me—to my disadvantage—with another woman?"

He marveled at her passion for the absolute truth, and he thought of Grace Cravatt and the many times he had taken her as a standard by which to judge Doris.

"Yes," he said again.

"Then, it is really forgivable that I did the same, is it not?" she asked with a charming ingenuousness.

"Entirely forgivable, Doris," he said gravely.

"And I have been selfish, too," she said. "All the time that Matthew was ill I did not open my mail. We were able to do everything within power of money to save our boy. But, oh Matthew, the thousands of mothers who must see their babies die for lack of proper food, or sunlight, or any one of the many things which money can procure! All this time I forgot that I have the power to help those mothers whose suffering is greater than mine, because an earthly inequality, and not some unalterable law of nature, robs them of their babies!"

He did not reply. He could only marvel at the grandeur of character of this wife of his who, at a moment when her own heart was torn and bleeding, could rise to impartial heights and say, "Other mothers suffer more than I!"

He remembered that Mrs. Ryan had said practically the same thing; had expressed a sense of resignation in natural death, but had rebelled furiously at death due to any purely earthly cause which might have been averted.

Suddenly there came to him a vivid realization of the fact that this quality which Doris was showing, and which it pleased him to term grandeur, was her strength. The moment was dynamic. It occurred to him that he had had an imperfect knowledge of her until now, and that his love for her, fine though it was, had lacked harmony, robustness and understanding. So deeply did he seem to delve into the mysteries of her soul that he had the sensation of absorbing her spiritual essence. Awed and humbled, he sensed that the thing of supreme im-

portance was to expunge every vestige of falseness or insincerity of which, in his dealings with her, he had been guilty in the past.

"Doris," he said, "I, too, have a confession to make. It is a graver and more serious one than yours. When you married me, you thought that I had been sincere in my work for the public weal. That was not so. Every act of philanthropy, every kindness shown had been based on the belief that I might thereby further my own ends, win a name for myself, you understand, and thus rise. Everything came to pass as I had expected, only now—at the end—Doris, I have broken with the Powers because of the new franchise."

She placed her hand on his arm, and looked into his eyes.

"I think," she said, "you do yourself an injustice. You pretended to yourself that you were doing kind things for selfish ends, but, in truth, you chose that way of rising because you liked to do kind things. And now, in the end, the truth in you prevails. It had to prevail. I knew that right along, Matthew."

He thought of what Andrew had said to him years ago. His estimate and Doris's tallied closely. And yet he felt they were idealizing him. They were incapable of seeing that he had been all wrong at the start, and had come right at the end by a miracle. And yet he was not sure of this. It seemed to him that never again would he feel sure of anything—except Doris's honor, and nobility, and courage. Life had dealt with him so whimsically. He had vowed to marry none but a woman whose very mind was untouched and virgin; yet he had married a widow. He had demanded egoistically that his son must be the image of himself; yet his son had been the image of another man. He had condemned infidelity as the unpardonable sin; yet he had pardoned his

wife when he thought her guilty of the unspeakable offense. Perhaps, after all, he was a better man than he himself knew. At all events, he meant to prove himself worthy of Doris in the future—that was to be his sole criterion—to be worthy of Doris and of Doris's love.

Doris, as if reading his thoughts, said, very earnestly: "Believe me, Matthew, the inner goodness was in you always. Every action of yours shows that."

He could not argue with her at this moment, and she continued: "Is it not cruel that our child's death was required to bring about a complete reconciliation? Without Little Matthew's death, doubt might have come back to harass and torture you. Through Andrew you know that your faith was justified. Is that not cruel?"

"You are mistaken," he said, "a reconciliation would have been brought about. But it would have lacked the sweetness, the sacredness with which it has been consecrated by our little son's death."

"Is that not cruel?" she persisted.

"It is the inviolable law," he said. "Some die so that others may obtain a full knowledge of the deeper meaning, the truer sense of life. Remember, dearest, that perhaps dying is not the hardest part. The pain of parting is the portion of the quick, not of the dead, and the lesson it carries with it may be read by all to whom is allotted the full span of life and to whom, therefore, the grief of parting is not spared. It is only through this great grief that we may attain a sense of the true proportion of life. The tinsel-decked success, the blatant happiness that flaunt themselves in the market-place are *not* the chief goals of life. Helpfulness, kindness, courtesy, which have been defined as love in little things, serve not only others, but ourselves best in the end. Through grief in death to a willingness to bear bravely, without repining,

whatever burden is laid upon us—through sorrow to peace. That I take it is the entire lesson."

And after a pause he added: "It is curious how Bible phrases and utterances, long forgotten, come back to us at such times as this."

"Of what are you thinking?" she asked.

He quoted gravely: "Now abide these three, hope, faith and charity; but the greatest of these is charity."

THE END.

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